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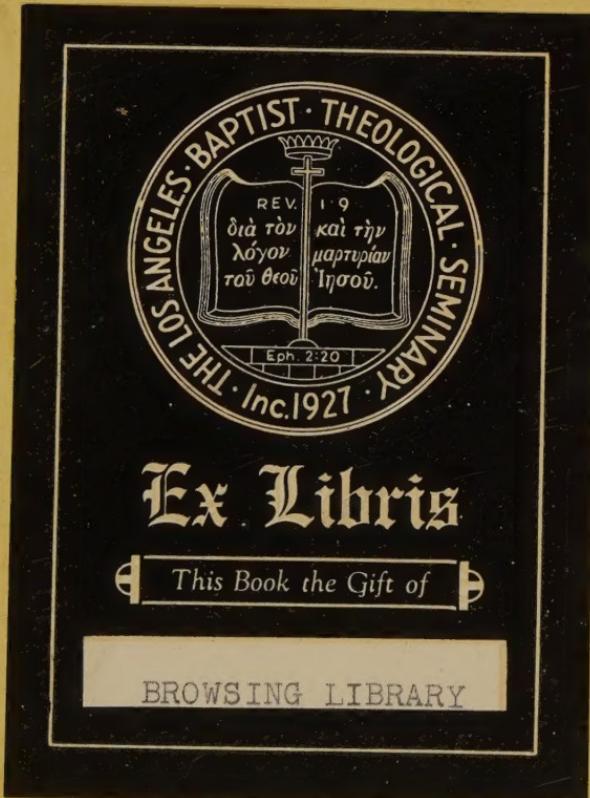
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LOWELL LECTURES

EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY.

~~LOWELL LECTURES.~~

VOLUME II.



# LOWELL LECTURES

ON THE

## EVIDENCES OF CHRISTIANITY,

BY

JOHN GORHAM PALFREY.

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WITH A DISCOURSE

ON THE

LIFE AND CHARACTER OF JOHN LOWELL, JR.,

BY EDWARD EVERETT.

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## COURSE II.

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SURVEY OF THE JEWISH, PAGAN, AND  
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[CONTINUED.]



## LECTURE XI.

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### GROUNDS OF PAGAN UNBELIEF.

My last two Lectures presented a sketch of the argument maintained by Jews in justification of their rejection of our faith. I proceed next to some account of the same controversy with the ancient heathens, and shall confine myself this evening to remarks upon the work of one of their writers on this subject, the Epicurean Celsus.

A preliminary observation needs to be made on the limited extent to which our religion gained credence with the idolatrous contemporaries of its first preachers; in other words, on its rejection by them, to the extent that it was rejected. And on this, I remark, first, that it is a mere fallacious artifice in reasoning, and that a very flimsy one, to say that the evidence could not have been good, since it left such numbers unconverted. The burden of proof is undoubtedly on the other side. The proper inquiry is, If the evidence was not good, how came

it to convert such numbers? Quiescence presents no problem to be solved. It is change, that betokens some impulse suitable to produce it. It is change that requires to be explained. Change is an effect demanding the action of some cause. To ask why numbers remained where they were, is to ask no significant question. It answers itself. They remained where they were, because there they had been. But if other numbers did not remain where they had been, if their quiescence was overcome, then there had been some cause in action; some force had been applied to move them from their old position.

I repeat, that it is not customary nor reasonable to demand an explanation of the continuance of an already existing state of things, nor to insist that an alleged cause could not have operated, because, to a greater or less extent, that state of things remained undisturbed. The material fact is, that to another extent, greater or less, it was disturbed; and this fact compels the inference, that some adequate cause must have been in action. But not to rest in this general statement of an unquestionable principle, I would recall attention to a course of remark in a former lecture,\* (which we cannot stop, nor can there be occasion, to reconsider in full,) to the effect that, for the very reason and to the very extent that Christianity was so indispensably needful to man, its evidence had to be offered to dis-

\* See Vol. I. p. 281, *et seq.*

ordered, reluctant, uncongenial, perverse minds. No fact is more familiar, none more constantly brought to notice in our daily experience, than that different men receive the same evidence differently, according to their respective previously existing states of feeling. The mind refuses to approach what it has no relish for. When approached, the mind practises frauds upon itself, so as to evade its force. Had men all been saints, Christianity, with its ample evidence, would have at once advanced to an unquestioned sway. But had men all been saints, they would not have so needed Christianity ; and the very basis of its proof, which is supplied by its necessity, would have been withdrawn. Because they were not saints, but benighted sinners, they were in absolute want of this agent of reform ; and for the same reason its triumphs were impeded. That it won no more conquests, is explained by the principle of repulsion in those whom it addressed ; that it won so many, is explained by the principle of power within itself.

But a few words, more particularly, as to Gentile unbelief, though I cannot think that the argument requires any thing beyond these general considerations. To a great extent, there is the best reason to believe that the proper evidence for our religion was unheeded by the Gentiles, particularly by the more cultivated portion. The popular Gentile scheme of religious faith regarded every new religious pretension in precisely that light which debarred the evidence for Christianity from

the benefit of any examination. The tolerance of Greek speculation and Roman politics placed the religions of all countries in some sort on a level. In their Pantheon there was a place for every new pretender, if he would only stand peaceably in his niche. Why be anxious about investigating any new claim, when, if it should prove unfounded, it was but one more fable exposed, if well-founded, one more deity enthroned? "He seemeth to be a setter forth of foreign gods," was the careless comment of the populace of Athens, when Paul "preached to them Jesus and the resurrection"; these names being apparently taken by them to indicate two divinities, a male and female. When, as it has been expressed, the different religions of the nations "were held by the vulgar to be equally true, by the philosophers to be equally false, and by the politicians to be equally useful," at what a disadvantage did Christianity demand the serious and attentive hearing on which its reasonable reception had to depend. With all classes, and especially the higher, it had further to labor under the prejudice of having originated in Judea, the country, as the polite Roman historian, Tacitus, expresses it, of "a most despicable race of slaves," a people who were a proverb among the nations for their low cultivation, and illiberal and bitter narrowness.

Under such circumstances, is it a question to be asked, why Christianity did not convert the heathen world? Without a fair examination, at least without some examination, of its claims, of course

nothing can command assent, whatever those claims may be; but, under such circumstances, it must needs have been that Christianity, even where it was offered, was constantly rejected without examination, was merely turned away from with disdain. And even when by chance it had obtained something that might be called a hearing, there was still a resource for the invincibly reluctant mind. The belief in magical arts, as competent to the production of supernatural effects, was a popular opinion of the day. That theory was applied to the miracles of Jesus, when some explanation of them, different from that of his divine commission, was found necessary. To the vulgar, who were indisposed to admit his pretensions, it afforded a plausible and sufficient explanation of his works; and if to the more enlightened it seemed itself a theory of questionable credit, still to many of them, when pressed with the evidence of the wonders which Jesus had wrought, it would be easier to assent to its truth, than to acknowledge him in the character he claimed.

Celsus, on whose argument against Christianity I am to remark this evening, was an Epicurean philosopher of the second century. The precise time of his life and writings is not known. Lardner places him in the last years of Marcus Antoninus, who died in the year 180.\* His work against Christianity, entitled, "The True Word," is lost.

\* See *Testimonies of Ancient Heathen Authors*, Chap. 18. § 1. Works, Vol. IV. (Edit. 4to.) pp. 113, 114.

But the answer to it, in the next century, by Origen, the most learned man of Christian antiquity, is still extant, and follows its course of argument with such careful detail, from step to step, and that with such large quotations, that, for all essential purposes, there is every appearance of our having the substance of the treatise in our hands. Another reason for this opinion is, that, in not a few instances, the Christian father appears embarrassed in his attempts at reply, and could not but have been sensible that his opponent had the advantage. He would not have produced what he was unable to answer, except under the impulse of an honest purpose to present the whole of his adversary's case. Origen also himself says; "That I may not appear purposely to pass by any portions because I have no answer, I have thought it best, according to my ability, to refute every thing proposed by Celsus, not so much observing the natural order of things, but that order which he has himself pursued."\* It is impossible to suppose that he would thus have invited the reader to observe that he took up all his adversary's objections, and that he would have adopted an inconvenient arrangement in order to facilitate a comparison, and then not have proceeded to fulfil his engagement.

And here I will make a passing suggestion, for which no more fit opportunity may occur, upon the fact that so few writings of ancient opponents of

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. i. § 41. (Opp. Tom. I. p. 357.)

Christianity survive ; the rest having been destroyed by the edicts of authority, or been suffered to perish through forgetfulness and neglect. It is exceedingly to be regretted that they do not survive ; and it is impossible not to disapprove, as well as lament, the weak zeal which doomed any of them to destruction. It was a zeal according to any thing rather than knowledge. But there is no pretence whatever for the idea that they were condemned to this fate, because the safety of Christianity was thought to require the suppression of their testimony against it. Some, no doubt, died that natural death which is the destiny of the great majority of books not approved by the prevailing sentiment. Not being esteemed after Christianity was in the ascendant, they were not in demand ; not being in demand, they were not copied ; not being copied, they, in course of time, disappeared.

As far as they were positively proscribed, and their circulation discouraged, it is an altogether gratuitous supposition that this was occasioned by a distrust of the soundness and sufficiency of the Christian evidences. A watchful father of a family in old times would be disinclined to see a copy of Celsus in the hands of his dependents, for the same reason that like displeasure might be occasioned at the present day by seeing a young reader engaged with Paine's "Age of Reason." He would disapprove of the book, and perhaps forbid its use, or even go the length of destroying it, not because he regarded it as containing truth which he wished to bury in

oblivion, but, on the contrary, because in his judgment it contained falsehoods which might be mischievous to immature and undiscerning minds. And so governments might condemn libraries to the flames. But why? Because they would use violent means for the protection of what they understood to be falsehood? Certainly it might be so. The case is abstractly supposable. But the solution, which abstractly is the more natural and probable, is the opposite one; namely, that their act was the dictate of an honest zeal, however misguided. And, as to the works of adversaries of the Christian faith, the supposition, as a general account of what has occurred, is sufficiently refuted by the facts of the case. State power, in league with religious imposture, would have done its work better. Christianity, if it had wanted confidence in its own truth and force, would not have allowed itself to be reproached, as it has been in the later times, with calumnies of its early foes. It had it in its power to bury such testimony, and it would have done so. That those calumnies have survived, when there was power to obliterate the record of them, is a fact, of itself, going far towards their refutation. And, however much of infidel argument and cavil may have perished in the lapse of time, the amount of them, which has outlived it, condemns the hypothesis of any deliberate and strenuous endeavours for their suppression.

One more remark, before I proceed to exhibit some of the contents of the work of this, the most

famous of the early opponents of Christianity. We should distinctly understand for what it is, that the friend of our religion consults this argument of its enemy. We do not take it up expecting to find in it direct corroboration of our faith, positive testimony in support of what we believe to be true. Of course, we expect nothing of this kind, because it is the work of one who rejected our faith. If this were to be had from Celsus, then Celsus would have been a Christian. As it is, he is not our witness, but a witness on the other side, whom we are cross-examining. Holding the position that he does, we are to expect to find him making the most of every doubt and objection that he could raise against our religion. He did not receive it for himself. He had undertaken, in an elaborate treatise, to bring it into discredit with others. He had talents and culture qualifying him for such a task. He lived in the time of a bitter and protracted persecution of the Christians, when no pains were spared to bring to light every thing that might appear to their disadvantage and that of their religion. He had conversed freely with Jews; indeed, in part of his work he personates a Jew; whatever might be contributed from their stock to the success of his argument was at his command.

That Celsus, then, should deal largely in hostile surmises and harsh assertions, is not a thing to surprise us. It ought to surprise us, if we found that he did not. To do it, belonged to the part he had undertaken; nor are his mere suspicions and asser-

tions, however plausible and confident in their show and tone, to have the slightest weight with us, provided we have proof from any other quarter,—even if we cannot obtain it from himself,—showing them to be without foundation. But, on the other hand, his omissions and his admissions are of great value. Whatever he could find to say with a decent pretext against the religion of Jesus, it is safe to presume that he did say; in other words, what he has not said, by way of controverting the alleged facts on which it rested, it is safe to presume that he, with the peculiar advantages for information belonging to the early age in which he lived, knew that there was no decent pretext for saying. Whatever admission of facts favorable to the claims of Christianity, he could with any face have avoided making, it may be confidently assumed that he would have avoided making; in other words, such admissions as we find must have been wrested from him by the force of notorious truth. The more unwilling his testimony, the more unquestionable.

Keeping these considerations in mind, let us proceed to a brief survey of the principal contents of his work commented on by Origen. And I will divide the selection I have made from his remarks relating to the evidence for our religion, into two parts; the first consisting of objections to it, the second of whatever makes in its favor. It is of course only specimens that can be given of matter spread through the Christian father's large work, divided into eight books; but it has been my conscientious

purpose not to pass over any material topic of the adverse argument. The order, in which the several topics were presented by Celsus, was very careless and inartificial (a fact of which Origen complains),\* and not such as to give them, in combination, any additional force; and, since to follow it would lead to inconvenient repetition, I will but present them in such succession as admits of their being distinctly viewed, arranging first however those which may be regarded as least material.

1. Celsus objects to Christianity, that it addressed itself to the meaner and less instructed sort of people. "These," says he, "are their institutions. 'Let no learned man, no wise or prudent man come over to us. For these things we esteem evil. But if any one is ignorant, weak, foolish, let him come confidently.' In declaring that such persons are worthy votaries of their God, they manifest that they are neither desirous nor able to attach to themselves any others than foolish, low, stupid persons, slaves, weak women, and children."† There is, of course, no argument in this. Christianity was true to its high pretensions, when it rebuked the false, pompous, and puerile philosophies of the day, and offered to the meanest a participation in the instructions of its own divine wisdom. But if it sought its disciples in the shambles of Athens, and among the purple-dyers of Thyatira, it had sought them and won them too, from the time of Paul's own

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. i §. 40. Opp. (Edit. Delarue) Tom. I. p. 357.

† Ibid. Lib. iii. § 44. (pp. 475, 476.) Conf. §§ 18. 59. (pp. 458, 486.)

preaching, in the Imperial household, and from the Platonic and Pythagorean schools. Origen's calm and dignified answer leaves nothing to be added. A period or two from it are enough for our present purpose. "It is untrue," he says, "that such persons only as Celsus describes, are those whom the heralds of the divine doctrine desire to persuade. Such indeed the word does invite, that it may do them good. But it invites also others altogether unlike them. .... There is no harm in being truly learned. Nay, learning is a way to virtue, though not even the Greek sages would assign that rank to persons holding perverse doctrines. .... And what doctrines can be called good, except such as are true and lead to goodness? To be a wise man, is a good thing; but to seem so only, is not good."\*

2. Celsus objects to the claims of the Christian doctrine, that it is but a republication of old truths. He says; "It is common to other philosophers, and contains no weighty or novel lesson."† And again; "The same things had been already better said among the Greeks, and that without threat or promise from God or his son."‡ Christianity might have done good service, though it had been but a republication of old truths, provided it had taught them with a new authority, for want of which they had been hitherto discredited or ineffectual; and if it were so, that the same things

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. iii. § 49. (pp. 479, 480.) † *Ibid.* Lib. i. § 4. (p. 323.)

‡ *Ibid.* Lib. vi. § 1. (p. 629.) *Conf.* Lib. vii. § 58. (p. 735.)

had been said among the Greeks “without threat or promise from God or his son,” and now were said with those threats and promises, this difference was the most important difference conceivable, provided the alleged origin of such threats and promises was well authenticated. But, as to the existence of the fact affirmed, we can judge as well as Celsus. We have the writings of those philosophers in our hands, who are said to have anticipated the truths of Christianity; and we know that the assertion was groundless. In the age of Celsus, when so little was known of the system of Christianity, except by those who had embraced it, it might do very well to represent it as but copying the trite systems of old opinion. But we perceive the assertion to be only the resort of a disingenuous controvertist, confident in his own boldness, and the ignorance of those whom he addressed.

3. Celsus, in that large part of his work wherein he argues in the character of a Jew, maintains the usual Jewish argument respecting the inconsistency of language of the Old Testament, with facts of the New Testament history, to which by Christian interpreters it was understood to relate. For instance, he insists; “The prophets say, that he who is to come will be a very powerful king, and lord of the whole earth, and of all nations and armies;” \* and again, in general, that “the prophecies correspond to innumerable others, more fitly

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. ii. § 29. (p. 412.)

than to Jesus ; ” — a remark which Origen tells him, in the first place, that no Jew, who understood the tone and spirit of those prophecies, could have ever ventured to make ; and, in the second, that it is of no force, unless fortified by a different kind of specification of prophecies, and of comments on their sense, from what Celsus has undertaken to give.\*

To pursue this topic would be to go out of our present way, to take up a part of the controversy, which I have already intimated my purpose to refer to another place in this series of remarks.† Let it suffice to say for the present, that the topic belongs to a course of reasoning quite independent of that which discusses the proper, positive, direct evidence for the divine origin of our religion. Questions respecting the application of Old Testament language to New Testament facts, whether that application have been made correctly or not by Christians, are strictly questions of Biblical exposition ; and, whatever their importance may be, no aid towards their solution is to be borrowed from the age of Celsus. Whether, for instance, the language of Isaiah, “ Who is this, that comes in dyed garments from Bozrah ? ” is a suitable description of Jesus of Nazareth, and, if not, whether the evidences of the Jewish or of the Christian religion are weakened by the want of correspondence,—these, without doubt, are proper subjects of inquiry,

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. ii. § 28. (p. 411.) Conf. Lib. i. § 50. (p. 366.)

† See Vol. I. p. 274.

but they are independent of the authority or opinion of the author whose writings are now under consideration.

4. Celsus deals largely in the easy artifice of exciting prejudice against the Christian faith and its author by the repetition of such scurrilous fables of Jewish device, as a very feeble cunning knows how to employ when the best of causes is to be deprived of the benefit of a fair hearing. Celsus does not repeat the grossest slanders to which I have before had occasion to refer. They were not obsolete in his time, but it is probable that he not only gave them no credit, but had the good taste to perceive, that to mention them with approbation would but prejudice his own argument. But “he reproaches Jesus,” says Origen, “with having had his birth in a Jewish village, of a mother in needy circumstances, who earned her living by spinning.” This may well have been, but he adds the description of her being “the wife of a carpenter, by whom she was divorced, being convicted of adultery;”\* all which is evidently only such a gloss as enemies would be likely to put on the real facts of the Gospel history, and thus serves for nothing so much as for a confirmation of the general outline of the latter. Again; how ready was the expedient of such a representation as the following, to discourage inquiry into the claims of the Christian faith, and repel association with its professors, on

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. i. § 28. (p. 346 )

the part of timid men. “Those who offer an invitation to other mysteries,” says Celsus, “make proclamation of this kind. ‘Whosoever has pure hands and is of wise discourse, whoever is clean from all fault, he whose conscience rebukes him with no evil, whose life has been well and justly passed, let them take part with us.’ . . . . But now let us hear whom the Christians invite. ‘Whoever,’ say they, ‘is a sinner, whoever is foolish, whoever is inexperienced, whoever, to say all in one word, is merely a wretch, to him the kingdom of God is open.’ And whom do they mean by a sinner? Do they not mean the cheat, the thief, the burglar, the poisoner, the sacrilegious man?”\* Once more, where the calumny referred to, which is not so much that of Celsus as of the Jews, has a peculiar interest, as leading to a remark of Origen, confirming what I have before said, of the object and effect of unfounded representations which were put in circulation; “Celsus,” says Origen, “proceeds in a manner like that of the Jews, who, when the Christian doctrine was first preached, circulated libels against it, pretending that the disciples sacrificed a child, and partook together of his flesh, and that, intent on deeds of darkness, they extinguished their lights, and practised promiscuous lewdness. Which calumny, however absurd, formerly prevailed much with many, fortifying them in their opposition to the faith; and even up to this

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. iii. § 59. (p. 486.)

time it continues to deceive some, who, because of their belief in it, have such an antipathy to Christians, that they refuse so much as to have any conference with them.”\* Who does not own here the traces of a mere blind hatred, unscrupulous as to the means of its indulgence?†

5. The attempt is made by Celsus, in a variety of instances, to point out incongruities in the conduct of Jesus, and in other particulars of the Gospel history. Let a few examples under this head content us. Celsus asks, as to the sufferings undergone by Jesus, and said to have been foretold by him, “What god, or demon, or even prudent man, who foresaw such misfortunes impending over him, would not have avoided them, if that were possible? who would have rushed into them, thus forewarned?”‡ a question which to us has no weight, in any other view, so great as in that of an evidence that the account of the disciples, from the first, had been, that Jesus foreknew the fate which eventually came upon him. Again says Celsus; “If he saw fit to submit to such evils, and met them through obedience to his father, it is plain that, he being a god, and consenting to what he endured, it could have occasioned him no inconvenience or

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. vi. § 27. (p. 651.)

† See Vol. I. pp. 287, 288. Athenagoras was contemporary with Celsus. The sole subject of his eloquent *Legatio pro Christianis*, addressed to the Emperors Antoninus and Commodus, is a defence of the sect against the three charges of atheism, cannibalism, and promiscuous impurity.

‡ *Contra Cels.* Lib. ii. § 17. (p. 403.)

suffering.”\* Again ; “They who lived with him, who listened to his voice, who were attached to him as their master, when they saw him tortured and dying, did not die with him, or for him, nor did they show any contempt of suffering. On the contrary, they denied that they were his disciples. But now you offer yourselves to die with him.”† Again ; “If he had really wished to display a divine power, he would have shown himself to his adversaries, to his judge, indeed to all men ; . . . . for he could no longer fear any man, when he had already died, and besides was, according to what you say, a god ; nor could he have been sent for the purpose of keeping himself hidden.”‡ Once more ; “If God, aroused like Jupiter in the play from a long sleep, wished to rescue the human race from evils, why did he send that spirit, of which you speak, into one corner of the earth ? It would have been fit to infuse it alike into many bodies, and send it abroad to the whole world. The dramatist,” he adds, “to excite a laugh in the theatre, describes Jupiter as awakening, and sending Mercury to the Athenians and Spartans. Do you not think that you do a more ridiculous thing in pretending that God sent his son to the Jews ?”§ I will not inquire whether there is more or less weight in such considerations ; but only suggest, that, whether more or less important, they derive no peculiar force from the circum-

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. ii. § 23. (p. 408.)

† *Ibid.* § 45. (p. 420.)

‡ *Ibid.* § 67. (p. 437.)

§ *Ibid.* Lib. vi. § 78. (p. 691.)

stances under which they were proposed ; and that the disputant, who, living in the second century, was disposed to resort to such means of discrediting Christianity, could not have felt very confident of possessing any knowledge with which to confute the alleged facts of its history.

6. Pressed by the direct miraculous evidence presented by Jesus in behalf of the divine origin of his message, Celsus resorts to the easy and popular solution of his having learned secret arts, or charms, during a residence, in his youth, in Egypt. Thus in one place his words are, “ While earning a poor living in Egypt, he there learned certain arts, greatly esteemed by the people of that country, and afterwards, returning home, he set up great pretension on account of them, and gave himself out to be a god.”\* And again, Origen, reporting part of his argument in a general description, says, “ Celsus, unable to look in the face the miracles which Jesus is recorded to have wrought, traduces them as enchantments.”† Whether Celsus was himself a believer in the actual potency of magical arts, or, when speaking of them without reference to this argument, would have represented them as only arts of cheating the senses of the spectator, may well admit of a question ; the more so, as Origen suggests that his opponent may have been the same person with one of that name, who had before

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. i. § 28. (p. 346.) Conf. § 38. (p. 356.)

† *Ibid.* Lib. ii. § 48. (p. 422.)

written against the reality of magic.\* On this point Origen says; “Celsus, perceiving that the great things done by Jesus would be adduced by us, pretends to admit the truth of what is written concerning his cures, his resurrection, and his dividing a few loaves among a multitude, leaving a quantity of fragments, with other things which he thinks his Apostles have recorded in glowing colors, and then says, ‘Come, let us grant you that these things were really done.’ But he immediately goes on to confound them with the works of sorcerers, and of persons instructed in Egypt, who profess to do a variety of wonders; . . . . and then he argues, ‘Because they do such things, must we therefore esteem them sons of God? Shall we not rather say, that they are the methods † of wicked and wretched men?’ You see then, that Celsus in a manner maintains that there is really such a thing as magic.” ‡

Whether Celsus, however, really did maintain its reality, is, as has been remarked, not entirely clear, though the probability of this derives some confirmation from an assertion which Origen represents him to have made in another place, namely, that Christians had their power through the names and invocation of certain demons.§ And, as to his

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. i. § 68. (p. 383.)

† I choose here, for my translation, a word as equivocal as the original, *ἐπιτηδίμωτα*, which is what the rhetoricians call a *μέσην λέξιν*, *media vox*. It neither implies a charge of fraud, nor the contrary.

‡ *Ibid.* (p. 382.)

§ *Ibid.* § 6. (p. 324.)

general habits of belief on such subjects, another passage of Origen is in point. “Now,” says he, let us see what Celsus says afterwards, where he alleges certain things from histories, themselves of an extraordinary nature, and near to incredible, but not disbelieved by him, if we may trust his word. First are the stories which he affirms concerning Aristeas of Proconnesus, of whom he thus speaks; ‘When, by divine power, he had disappeared from the view of men, he was afterwards seen again, and visited many parts of the world.’\* Again; “Celsus, besides, speaks of Clazomenes, and having referred to his history goes on; ‘Do they not say that his soul often left his body, and wandered about without it?’”† Again; “Celsus speaks too of Cleomedes of Astypalæa, who,” he says, “when shut up in a chest, held it fast; but when it was opened he was not there, having escaped by some divine power.”‡

The truth, on the whole, appears to be that Celsus had no very settled opinion on the subject of magical powers, either for or against; though, from the general skeptical habits of his mind, he would have been disinclined to a belief in them, as well as in any thing else extraordinary, when viewed as a mere abstract question. From all that has come down to us respecting him, he seems to have been one of that class of persons, who have no clear and decided leaning to any opinion, true or false, but who are especially indisposed to believe any thing

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. iii. § 26. (pp. 462, 463.)

† Ibid. § 32. (p. 467.)

‡ Ibid. § 33. (p. 468.)

unusual, or which would disturb the course of things around them, or invade the habits of their own lives. When the question was only respecting magical arts, he viewed that pretension with incredulity. But, when the greater question was agitated respecting the miraculous works of Jesus, the admission of the former hypothesis, to serve the turn, was to him preferable to the admission of the latter. At all events, one thing is clear, that Celsus knew that among the persons for whom he was arguing there were those who were so well convinced of the reality of the mighty works of Jesus as actual phenomena, that some other solution besides that of their being actual divine interpositions needed to be proposed, in order to prevent their being satisfied by the evidence, and embracing the religion.

7. Celsus in one place makes a suggestion which seemed of grave importance to the adversaries of our faith, till its true import had been properly expounded. “After this,” says Origen, “Celsus says, that ‘some believers, as if under a suicidal impulse of inebriation, change the Gospel from the first text thrice, four times, yea, many times, and make it over, so as the better to reply to opponents.’”\* This loose and general charge of an incautious and petulant adversary has no weight, taken in any sense, when opposed to that of the positive argument for the authenticity and integrity of our Gospels, which I have presented in a previous

\* *Contra Cels.* Lib. ii. § 27. (p. 411.)

part of this discussion.\* Origen seems to lay no stress upon it, nor to entertain any apprehension of its being seriously urged; but dismisses it, after merely saying, in three periods, that he knows not who can be meant as having changed the Gospel, except certain unacknowledged sectaries and half-believers, for whom Christianity was in no sort responsible. It is probable that Celsus had observed the difference of contents between the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and chose to put this construction, evidently false, upon the existence of that difference; in which case his remark is another corroboration, if more were needed, of the existence of those books, marked by their present characteristics, in his time. It is important also to observe, that, whatever he intended to affirm, he affirmed at most of "some disciples," which is a virtual acquittal of the body. And what is more important yet, is, that in a work, of which the triumphant argument,—if such an argument could have been plausibly sustained,—would have been, that the records of the ministry of Jesus and of the first preachers of his religion were then of recent origin, we find throughout no pretence nor insinuation of such a charge having been ventured on.

We have thus seen what topics of argument it was, that Celsus, a man of distinguished ability and knowledge, found in the second century with which to assail the Christian faith. Let me recapitulate,

\* See Vol. I. Lectures IV. & V.

in a few words, before proceeding to observe what positive confirmation his writings offer to that faith. His great grounds of objection to it are, that it addressed itself to the meaner and less instructed sort of people ; that it is, according to his statement, but a republication of old truths ; that it does not exhibit the correspondence, asserted by its adherents, with the prophetical writings of the Old Testament ; that it is subject, or rather its disciples are subject, to certain opprobrious charges ; that there are incongruities in the conduct of Jesus, and in other circumstances of the Gospel history ; that the wonderful works of Jesus, if actually performed, were performed by magical arts ; and, finally, if the passage containing the remark has been understood correctly, that the Gospel had suffered some alteration, as it existed in the hands of some disciples. These objections, one or two of them insignificant, and the rest not sustained in point of fact to any significant extent, were the best that an acute and accomplished adversary found to adduce at that early period, when, if the essential facts alleged for the Gospel had not rested on an unassailable basis of truth, the obvious resource of infidelity would have been to collect evidence to disprove them.

On the other hand, what do we find in Celsus to corroborate the evidence of our faith ?

In particular, we find ample testimony to two important points ; the one, that the facts of the Gospel history, which Christians, in the age of Celsus,

averred to be true, and which they preached, travelled, and endured hardships, indignities, and death in maintenance of, were the same which Christians of the later ages have received as accompanying the introduction and promulgation of their faith; the other, that the records of those facts, in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and the other books of the New Testament, were, in the days of Celsus, in the hands of Christians, as they are now, and enjoyed among them the same undisputed credit and authority; the latter, a point which every one who has considered its relations sees to be of the very highest importance, and one which, it is scarcely going too far to affirm, might be satisfactorily proved from the writings of Celsus alone.

First; as to the facts of the Gospel history, as understood in Celsus's time, considered independently of the writings which recorded them. And while I name a few of those which this author has specified, I ask that it may be observed what a perfect reply this specification by him, considering the time when he lived, affords to the scheme of the allegorists; that is, of those who have pretended that the accounts of Jesus were but allegorical representations, or the embodying, in a fabulous character, of fancies floating in the popular mind;—a theory, which in order to adopt, it would seem that one must be utterly ignorant, I will not say of the history of Christianity, but of the history of unbelief. It has been said, not at all too strongly, that “we

have in Celsus, in a manner, the whole history of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels.”\* “It is but a few years,” says he, endeavouring to disparage the religion for its recent rise, “since Jesus introduced this doctrine, and came to be esteemed by Christians the Son of God.”† He refers to the reputed miraculous birth of Jesus, his mother being a virgin, espoused to a carpenter, and dwelling in a Jewish village;‡ to the asserted visit of the Magi, to the plot of Herod against his life, and the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem;§ to the appearance of the dove at his baptism;|| to his being habitually accompanied, as Celsus phrases it, by “ten or eleven mean persons, vile publicans and sailors”;¶ to the miracles ascribed to him, such, he says, as curing diseases, raising the dead, feeding multitudes with a few loaves, of which a quantity was left;\*\* to his being called on in the temple, for a sign from heaven;†† to the voice from heaven, on the mountain of transfiguration;‡‡ to his being betrayed by one disciple, and deserted by the rest;§§ to his being asserted to have foreseen and foretold all that

\* Lardner. *Testimonies of Ancient Heathens.* Chap. 18. § 12. (Vol. IV. p. 144.)

† Origen. *Contra Cels.* Lib. i. § 26. (p. 344.)

‡ Ibid. § 28, (p. 346;) Conf. § 32, (p. 349—350;) § 39, (p. 356;) § 69, (p. 383, 384.) Lib. vi. § 73. (p. 687.)

§ Ibid. Lib. i. § 58. (p. 373.) || Ibid. § 41. (p. 357.)

¶ Ibid. § 62. (p. 376;) Conf. Lib. ii. § 46. (p. 421.)

\*\* Ibid. Lib. i. § 68. (p. 382.) †† Ibid. § 67. (p. 382.)

‡‡ Ibid. Lib. ii. § 72. (p. 441.)

§§ Ibid. § 9, (p. 392;) § 20, (p. 405;) § 21. (p. 407.)

befell him ; \* to his praying, that, if possible, the cup might pass from him ; † to the denial of him by Peter ; ‡ to the reproaches cast upon him while on the cross ; § to his drinking the gall and vinegar ; || to the purple robe, the crown of thorns, and the reed for a sceptre ; ¶ to the blood that flowed from his pierced side ; \*\* to the darkness and earthquake at his death ; †† to his alleged resurrection from the dead, and to some of the circumstances of his re-appearance, even to the showing of his hands and his feet. ‡‡ I am not of course bringing Celsus forward as a direct witness to the reality of these facts but as an indirect witness to them, through his direct testimony to the other fact of their constituting the established belief of Christians of his day ; of their being identified in the minds of those Christians with the history of their faith ; of their making part of that message to the world, the truth of which Christians were every where asserting at the hazard of their lives.

But secondly, — what is of still greater importance, — Celsus the heathen is a most express and unsuspicious witness to that cardinal point in the Christian evidences, the genuineness of the New Testament records. As Chrysostom well says,

\* Origen. *Contra Cels.* Lib. ii. § 13, (p. 398;) § 15, (p. 401;) § 17, (p. 403;) § 18, (p. 404.)

† Ibid. § 24. (p. 409.)

‡ Ibid. § 18. (p. 404.)

§ Ibid. § 35. (p. 415.)

|| Ibid. § 37. (p. 416.)

¶ Ibid. § 34. (p. 415.)

\*\* Ibid. § 36. (p. 416.)

†† Ibid. § 55. (p. 429.)

‡‡ Ibid. §§ 55, 70. (pp. 429, 440.)

“Celsus, and Porphyry after him, are our sufficient witnesses to the antiquity of our books, for certainly they have not opposed what was written after their time.”\* “The Jew in Celsus,” says Origen, “proceeds thus; ‘I could say many things, and that truly, concerning the affairs of Jesus, not according with those written by his disciples. But I purposely abstain.’”† The boast of what he could do, but forbears to do, will pass for what it may be thought worth; but the words show that, in the writer’s time, there were narratives of Jesus’s ministry well known, and understood to be written by *disciples* of his, a designation of those writers, that must be taken in the strict sense in which we commonly apply it, as the community in general are by Celsus constantly called by the names *Christians* and *believers*. Says Origen (who, let it be remembered, makes these suggestions incidentally,—he is not urging the argument with which we are now engaged), “The Jew in Celsus says, ‘These things we allege out of *your own writings*, in addition to which we need no other testimony.’”‡ There were, then, certain writings, received among Christians, to assail which was to assail what they admitted to be of paramount authority, and coincident with the credit of their faith. Again says Origen; “Celsus quoted many things from the

\* Chrysost. *in Epist. Prior. ad Corinth.* Hom. vi. Tom. III. p. 277. (Edit. Eton.)

† Origen. *Contra Cels.* Lib. ii. § 13. (p. 398.) ‡ Ibid. § 74. (p. 442.)

Gospel according to Matthew, as the star that rose at the birth of Jesus, and other wonderful events.”\* Again; “Celsus maintains, that the genealogists of Jesus were extravagant, in pretending to trace him to the first man and to the line of Jewish kings.”† Here is a distinct reference to the introductions of both Matthew’s Gospel and Luke’s. Celsus speaks of *composers* of genealogies, and not of one only; and Luke only has carried his up to Adam, the first man. Celsus in many instances uses the very language of the New Testament. “The Christians,” he says, “have such precepts as this; . . . . ‘If one smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other.’”‡ He asks, “why Christians will not worship demons;” and replies, “Because they are taught, ‘it is impossible to serve more than one master.’”§ He refers to Jesus’s predictions concerning false prophets; || to his prohibitions of worldly anxiety, with the illustrations drawn from the care of Providence for the lilies and the ravens; ¶ to his comparison of the difficulty of a rich man’s entering the kingdom of heaven to that of a camel’s going through a needle’s eye.\*\* “To the sepulchre of Jesus,” he says, “there are said to have come two angels, by some; by others, only

\* Origen. *Contra Cels.* Lib. i. § 34. (p. 352.)

† Ibid. Lib. ii. § 32. (p. 413.)      ‡ Ibid. Lib. vii. § 58. (p. 735.)

§ Ibid. § 68. (p. 742.) Conf. Lib. viii. §§ 2, 3, 15. (pp. 745. 752.)

|| Ibid. Lib. ii. § 53. (p. 427.)      ¶ Ibid. Lib. vii. § 18. (p. 706.)

\*\* Ibid. Lib. vi. § 16. (p. 641.)

one” ;\*—a remarkable exactness, for Matthew and Mark speak of one only, while Luke and John mention two, a fact which Origen immediately adduces, in explanation of his statement. Once more, though this detail might be much farther pursued ; Origen, in replying to Celsus’s remarks on what seemed to him the unbecoming humiliation of Jesus, says, “ Whence did you learn these facts, Celsus, but from the Gospels ? so that, instead of ridicule, . . . . you ought to admit at once the frankness of the writers, and the magnanimity of him, who voluntarily submitted to such indignities for the good of men.” †

In regard, then, to this last division of our survey of the work of Celsus, let the following facts be borne in mind. He speaks of books written by disciples of Jesus, without any intimation of his so much as suspecting them to have had any other origin. He refers to numerous statements concerning the actions and discourses of Jesus, all of which are found in our present Gospels. He makes numerous objections to accounts received by Christians respecting the Saviour ; and those accounts are all without exception now read in the same books ; nor does he hint at any received narrative concerning him, but what is therein contained. And he assails their contents, under an evident sense of their possessing such authority with Christians, that an injury

\* Origen. *Contra Cels.* Lib. v. § 56. (p. 621.)

† Ibid. Lib. ii. § 34. (p. 415.)

to their credit was a vital injury to Christianity itself. Than this indirect evidence, derived from that early age, no evidence for the genuineness and original authority of our sacred books could well be stronger.

There is good evidence in Celsus of the early, rapid, and wide, though harassed and obstructed, propagation of the faith; but on such collateral points, however interesting, I will not fatigue you with citations. We have seen what sort of arguments it was that Celsus was able to collect against Christianity. We ought not to forget with what advantages he undertook a work, in which he was destined so signally to fail. His abilities and learning, as is apparent from the fragments, were such as to make him an effective champion of any cause which had strength of its own. He professes to have used particular diligence to acquaint himself with the affairs of Christians. He had read the books of Moses, and perhaps the whole of the Old Testament; and of the historical books, at least, of the New, we have seen how well he was possessed. He had discoursed at large with Jews, acquainting himself with the points in controversy between them and the new sect, and also with the calumnies by which they had aimed to obstruct its rise; and the motives, whatever they were, which induced a person of his consideration to engage in the dispute, would influence him also to prosecute it with the best devotion of his powers.

What I have proposed to say respecting the bearing of his work, at this day, on the evidences of our religion, particularly on that all-important point of them, the authenticity of the Gospels, I now conclude with a few sentences of two judicious writers, which I take from the close of Dr. Lardner's chapter upon Celsus, and which embrace thoughts that could not be better expressed.

"Whilst," says Dr. Doddridge, "from his quotations from, and references to, the books of the New Testament, Celsus argues sometimes in a very perverse and malicious manner, he still takes it for granted, as the foundation of his argument, that whatever absurdity could be fastened upon any words or actions of Christ, recorded in the Evangelists, it would be a valid objection against Christianity; thereby in effect assuring us, not only that such a book did really exist, but that it was universally received by Christians in those times as credible and divine. Who can forbear adoring the depths of divine wisdom, in laying such a firm foundation for our faith in the Gospel history, in the writings of one who was so inveterate an enemy to it, and so indefatigable in his attempts to overthrow it?" "Celsus," says the anonymous author of "The Evidence of the Resurrection cleared up," "lived at no great distance from the apostolic age, at a time when all religions were tolerated but the Christian, when no evidence was stifled, no books destroyed, but the Christian. And yet Celsus labored under the same want of evidence as modern

unbelievers, and had only the Gospel to search (as Origen more than once observes) for evidence against the Gospel. A strong proof that there never had been any books of any credit in the world, that questioned the Gospel facts, when so spiteful and so artful an adversary as Celsus made no use of them."

In my next Lecture, which will relate to the Pagan controversy in the third century, I shall speak particularly of the writings of Minucius Felix, Porphyry, and Arnobius.

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## LECTURE XII.

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GROUNDS OF PAGAN UNBELIEF.

[CONTINUED.]

My last Lecture was devoted to an account of the argument against Christianity by Celsus the Epicurean, in the second century, as it has descended to us incorporated in the reply of the Christian father, Origen; an argument on the whole more important than any other of the same class which has been bequeathed to us by antiquity, whether we consider the time to which it belongs (seventy or eighty years only after the death of the last survivor of the apostles), the extent and variety of its topics, or the eminence of its author and his opponent. I am this evening to give a brief account of the state of the controversy at three different later periods, bringing it down to the end of the third century, or two centuries from the death of John.

Early in the third century, that is, contemporaneously with Origen, lived the Christian father Marcus Minucius Felix, an eminent professional

pleader at Rome, before, and probably after, his conversion to Christianity. He wrote a defence of the faith, still extant, in the form of a dialogue between Cæcilius Natalis, a heathen, and Octavius Januarius, a disciple. Cæcilius urges his objections; Octavius replies to them; and at the close Cæcilius professes himself convinced, and desirous to enrol himself as a believer. The piece has great merit; and the candor, with which the Christian argument is urged, creates in the reader a strong persuasion, that under the character of Cæcilius the author has given a fair representation of the current heathen objections of the day; besides that, writing for the conviction of Gentile unbelievers, it is reasonable, independently of any presumption of his honesty, to suppose that he would be at pains to acquaint himself with the efficient grounds of their unbelief, and state them substantially in their full force. If he should pass over what was mainly relied upon by the other party, it could not but be manifest to him that his work would be but labor lost.

But the plea of Cæcilius is nothing but an appeal to prejudice. There is nothing in it that deserves the name of reasoning upon the merits of the question; and as far as it may serve us for a specimen of the methods in use at that day to prevent the increase of the number of Christians, it shows that these consisted in merely exciting odium against their opinions and their persons. Cæcilius, after a long train of general remark upon the difficulty of arriving at religious truth, the great variety

of speculations concerning it, and the arrogance of any who pretend to profess it, especially to the exclusion of others, declares it to be the only prudent course to follow the religion of one's ancestors, and then launches out into a copious panegyric upon the systems of Gentile superstition, and the constancy with which they had been adhered to by their votaries.\* This leads him to speak of the Christians, whom he introduces by saying, that he “cannot endure men of such audacity . . . . that they seek to overthrow or to weaken so ancient, so useful, so salutary a faith.” “Is it not horrible,” he asks, “that men of a miserable, lawless, and desperate faction should thus assail the gods; men who, collecting from the lowest dregs of the people weak and uninstructed persons, and credulous women, who fall into their snares through the facility of their sex, band together a mob in a profane conspiracy, and in nightly assemblies, solemn fasts, and unnatural feasts, sanction their compact with atrocious rites? A set of people they are, artful, and shunning the light; in public they are dumb; in corners they are garrulous; they abhor the temples as they would funeral piles; they despise the gods; they ridicule our sacred solemnities. Wretches that they are, themselves in rags, they pretend to look down on the honors and purple of our priests. With astonishing folly and incredible arrogance, they defy present suffering, but tremble at that which is un-

\* Minucii Felicis *Octavius*. §§ 1—7. pp. 1—69. (Edit. Lugd. Bat. 1709.)

certain and future ; and, while they fear to die after death, death itself they do not fear,—a fallacious hope so soothes their dread with the image of after recompenses.”\*

This is but vague railing. What is more specific follows. “At last,” says Cæcilius, “as wickedness is always fruitful, the corruption of their manners increasing day by day, the impious brotherhood observe everywhere their shocking orgies. Such a nuisance should be execrated and extirpated. They know each other by secret signs and marks, and love each other almost before a mutual recognition ; a certain religion of license every where unites them. . . . I hear that, by force of some stupid opinion,—I know not what,—they adore a consecrated head of that vilest of cattle, the ass ; a religion well corresponding to such morals as theirs.” Others, he says, bring against them a charge of an atrocious kind of worship, which he specifies, but which I cannot repeat. “I know not whether this is false,” he goes on, “but suspicion naturally attaches to their secret and nocturnal assemblies.” Then comes that fable of his, to which I referred on a former occasion,† of their killing a child with various ceremonies, licking its blood, and tearing it limb from limb, at the initiation of novices ; on which he remarks, that “it is a story as offensive, as it is well known.” And lastly, in this cool enumeration of their offences, he adds, “As to their

\* Min. Fel. *Octavius*. § 8. (pp. 70 — 89.) † See Vol. I. p. 288.

feasts, the thing is notorious; it is everywhere talked of. . . . On a set day they meet to keep it, with all their children, sisters, matrons, associates of both sexes and of every age, and then, when the banquet is over, the lights are quenched, and they practise promiscuous impurity.” \*

Such were his assertions. What kind of proof had he? Common report, he says; but also something else; and what was that? It was such reasoning upon appearances and probabilities as he presents in his closing remark on this topic, immediately following what I have read. “I pass over many things,” he says, “on set purpose. For these, which I have already mentioned, are too many, all or most of which are confirmed as to their truth by the affected obscurity which this religion observes. For why do they so strive to conceal their worship, when what is honorable delights in publicity, only vice and crime love the darkness? Why have they no altars, no temples, no images, why do they not speak boldly, and meet openly, unless their worship and doctrine are things to be punished and to be ashamed of?” † Thus it was, that the poor Christians, driven by their persecutors into hiding places for the celebration of their worship, had the very resource of their distress and fears turned into a weapon of detraction, and a justification of the injuries which drove them thither.

What remains of the plea of Cæcilius treats three

\* Min. Fel. *Octavius*. § 9. (pp. 90—101.)

† Ibid. § 10. (p. 101.)

topics. First, he finds fault with the Christian and Jewish notions of the divine nature and character. "Whence, what, and where," he asks, "is that single, solitary, forlorn divinity, whom no free race, no state, at least no Roman doctrine, knows any thing about? Only the wretched rout of Jews recognises a sole Deity; and they adore him with pomp and ceremony, with temples, altars, and victims,—a God so without force and power, that he is himself, with his nation, enslaved to the Romans. But the Christians, what monstrous follies do they fabricate in respect to him! That God of theirs, whom they can neither show to others, nor see themselves, they pretend makes diligent inquisition into the characters of all men, their acts, even their words, nay, their secret thoughts. They will have it that he goes about every where, yet is every where present as if stationary. They will have him to be restless, officious, even impudently inquisitive. At all men's doings, they say, he stands by; in all places he is roaming; while thus scattered so widely, it is impossible he should benefit individuals, or, occupied with single cares, should take care of the whole." \*

The objector next addresses himself to find flaws in the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, and the opinions of disciples concerning the final catastrophe of human things; and is at pains to point out circumstantial incongruities in the opinion of a revivi-

\* Min. Fel. *Octavius*. § 10. (pp. 104—108.)

fication of the body.\* And lastly, with a strange inconsistency with the tenor of his previous complaints, he upbraids Christians with their indifference even to innocent pleasures and festivities, as well as to pain. “ You have to bear,” he says, “ threats, injuries, tortures. You not only adore, but you endure, the cross. You are brought to those flames in this life, which you predict as an object of dread in the next. Where is that God of yours, who can help the risen, but has no aid for the living? Do not the Romans, without his assistance, conquer, reign, enjoy the wealth of the whole world, and hold dominion over you, while you, living in suspense and anxiety, abstain even from irreproachable pleasures? You do not frequent the spectacles; you do not take part in the games; no public feast witnesses your presence; . . . . you do not wreath your heads with garlands; you do not indulge in the luxury of perfumes; ointments you only use at funerals.” He concludes, by saying, that “ for such uninstructed, unpolished, and unmannered persons, it is enough to look at what is beneath their feet. When they are not competent to estimate the practices of civil life, still less is it theirs to treat of the mysteries of divinity. If they will philosophize, they will do well to adopt the maxim of that prince of sages, Socrates, whose well-known reply, when interrogated respecting heavenly things, was, ‘ Whatever is above us, to us is nothing.’ ”†

\* Min. Fel. *Octavius*. § 11. (pp. 108 — 117.)

† Ibid. §§ 12, 13. (pp. 119 — 128.)

This is the argument against Christianity, or rather against adopting Christianity, which one, who knew of what he was affirming, put into the mouth of a polished heathen at the beginning of the third century. I am greatly tempted to make free extracts from the admirable answer to it which follows; but that does not belong so much to our subject, and I must forbear, so as not to encroach on the space devoted to other topics. “It is a natural impulse,” says Octavius, the Christian interlocutor, in his reply, “to hate whomsoever you fear, to molest, if you can, whomsoever you dread. So the powers of evil, who are hostile to us Christians and our faith, occupy men’s minds, and shut up the accesses to their bosoms, so that men hate us before they know us, and are prevented from coming to that knowledge of us, which would lead them either to imitate us, or at least to withhold their condemnation. How unjust it is to pass judgment without knowledge or inquiry, as you are doing, learn from my own case, who have occasion to repent of formerly having done the same. For I was once as you are now, and in my blindness and dulness entertained the same persuasions; as that Christians worshipped monstrous shapes, devoured the flesh of infants, and took part in incestuous debauchery; nor did I reflect that such stories were constantly circulated without proof or inquiry, nor consider the striking fact, that in so long a time no accomplice in such crimes had come forward to inform against them, when he would thus have

secured, not only pardon, but reward. . . . . And when I had any of those people charged with sacrilege, with incest, even with parricide to defend," — here the writer refers to his professional practice in the courts, — "I hardly thought it worth while to hear what account they would give of themselves, but sometimes, through very pity, was harsh and stern with them, insisting that they should confess their crimes, that by that means they might save their lives; thus tormenting them, as I now know, with an examination, directed not to bring out the truth, but to extort a falsehood. And if any weak man, overborne and subdued by misfortune, could be brought to deny that he was a Christian, I showed him all favor, considering that, when he had abjured that name, he had, by the denial, as it were, expiated all his misdeeds. Do you not see, that as I felt and acted then, so you are feeling and acting now? . . . . By a prompting of the powers of evil, I say it is, that that false rumor was originated and is spread. Thence it is, that you say you hear that the head of an ass with us is an object of religious veneration. For who so foolish as to adore such an object? Who so much more foolish as to believe that it is adored, unless he is prepared to adore it himself?" \*

Further on, he says, "I should like once to see the man, who affirms, or really believes, that we Christians are initiated with the murder and blood

\* Min. Fel, *Octavius*. §§ 27, 28. (pp. 283 — 290.)

of an infant. Do you think it possible, that such a soft and delicate body could be willingly exposed to mortal wounds? . . . . No one, when he thinks of it, can credit it, except the man who could do it.”\* And in another place, “As to that festival of impurity of which you spoke, this again is a demoniacal fabrication, to rob us of the honor due to our chastity, and expose us instead to the abhorrence that should visit shameless infamy; and this *to the end of estranging men from us* through disgust at our bad repute, *before they can look into the truth*. And as to this charge, that very Fronto, to whom you appeal for it,”—the preceptor of Marcus Antoninus is supposed here to be meant,—“did by no means affirm its truth as a witness, but only threw it out as a loose aspersion in his character of a disclaimer.”†

Then follows,—in that tone of generous confidence in the truth of what is spoken, which can scarcely be counterfeited,—a general vindication and assertion of the character of Christians,‡ closing with an eloquent passage, which I cannot forbear to quote, though my remarks on this writer have already exceeded the proportion of this Lecture which I had appropriated to them. “Do you pretend that we conceal our worship, because we have no temples nor altars? What image should we erect to God, when, rightly considered, man himself

\* Min. Fel. *Octavius*. § 30. (pp. 305, 306.)      † Ibid. § 31. (p. 322.)

‡ Ibid. (pp. 327—336.)

is his image? What temple need we build to him, when the universe, fashioned by his hand, is not large enough to enclose him? . . . . Is he not better set up in our minds, consecrated in the depth of our bosoms? Shall I present victims to the Lord, which he bestowed for my use, and so throw him back his gift? It were ungrateful. The acceptable offering is, an honest soul, a pure mind, a clear conscience. He who preserves his innocence, worships God; he who observes justice, sacrifices to God; he who abstains from artifice, performs a service of propitiation; he who rescues a fellow man from danger, immolates a costly victim. These are our sacrifices, these our holy ritual; thus he among us is the most religious man, who is the most upright. But, you say, we worship a God, whom we cannot show to others, nor see ourselves. Yes, because we can perceive and feel him, but cannot see him, therefore we believe that he is God. For in his works, and in all the agencies of his world, we trace his ever-present efficacy, in thunder, in lightning, in clear weather. Do not be surprised not to see God. Every thing is agitated and borne on by the wind, yet the wind is no object of sight. By means of the sun it is that we see, but we cannot look into the sun. It repels and disables the vision, and, if you gaze long, the sight is quenched. What? will you look at the maker of the sun, at the fountain of light, when you avert your eye from his lightnings, when you hide away from the reverberation of his thunder? Will you look upon God

with the outward eyes, when you cannot so much as see or apprehend that spirit of your own, by which you live and speak? But God, you say, is ignorant of the deeds of men; and, dwelling in heaven, can neither compass the whole, nor take note of individuals. O man, you err and are deceived. For from what place is God far distant, when all the regions of heaven and earth, through the creation's utmost bounds, are known to God, and full of him, and when he is not only nearer than aught else to us, but pervades our very being? Consider the sun once more. It is fixed in the sky, but is, so to speak, scattered over all lands, and nowhere is its brightness eclipsed. How much more may this be said of God, the maker of all things, the inspector of all. From him nothing can be hidden; he is present in darkness, he is present in our thoughts, as much as in other retreats. We not only act under him, but, as I may almost say, we live with him.”\*

Thus could write one of that much disparaged class of authors, the early Christian fathers, and he certainly not one of the most eminent of their number. Such notions of religion, of the Deity, of duty, shining through the spiritual darkness of that self-bewildered and cheated age, are themselves no less than a token of the divine origin of the faith from which they sprang, though it is not in that light that we are now regarding them. The writer

\* Min. Fel. *Octavius*. § 32. (pp. 336—343.)

passes to an exposition, — much of it, in rhetorical force and beauty, worthy of the best Latin age, — of his views of the resurrection, of the future life, of the last catastrophe of human things, and finally, recurring to a topic before treated, of the actual character and becoming course of Christians ; of whom he says, “ Your prisons are crowded with your own people, while of ours no one is ever seen there, except as arraigned for his religion, or else some apostate from it.”\* With these topics most of the remainder of his treatise is occupied ; but I have already presented what is most material to our purpose, and we have not time to accompany him further.

Later in the same century with Minucius Felix, lived Porphyry, a professor and teacher of what are called in the histories of philosophy, the *New Platonist*, or *Eclectic*, doctrines. The rise of this sect is traced by historians partly to a desire to oppose a philosophical system of paganism to the triumphant progress of Christianity. Ammonius Saccus, of Alexandria, who lived at the end of the second and beginning of the third century, is commonly regarded as its founder. Among his disciples, who were eminent and numerous, two of the most distinguished were Longinus and Plotinus, of the former of whom at Athens, and afterwards of the latter at Rome, Porphyry was a hearer. Porphyry was born in Syria, in the year 233. His name was

\* Min. Fel. *Octavius*. § 33 — 35. (pp. 344 — 365.)

Melek, which in the language of that country signifies *a king*, and which Longinus translating into Greek, called him Πορφυρίος, Porphyry, that is *purple*, or *purple-wearer*. At the time when he lived, Christianity, though still laboring under grievous discouragements, and making progress against a vast opposition, had yet forced its way to such a place among the elements of the social system as to forbid its being treated with mere contumely and outrage. Christians had lived down the gross calumnies by which it had been attempted to place them under the ban of the rest of the world, and no trace of the worst of those slanders appears in the remains of the writings of Porphyry. He wrote fifteen books “Against the Christians,” which were doomed to destruction in the following century by the weak piety of Theodosius. The works of three fathers, in formal reply to his, have also unhappily perished; \* but the consideration attached to his name caused his treatise, now in question, to be so frequently referred to by the ancient writers of the Church, as to afford us the means of obtaining a substantially adequate idea of the course and topics of its argument. The topics thus ascertained to have been urged in it, I proceed now to particularize, with occasional specimens of the manner of their illustration. There are pieces ascribed to the same author, but of uncertain authenticity, which, could

\* Methodius, Eusebius of Cæsarea, and Apollinarius. *Vide* Hieron. *Catal. Script. Eccles.* (Opp. Tom. I. p. 404.) *Præf. in Daniel.* 120. (*Ibid.* p. 1045.)

they be relied upon, would furnish highly interesting contributions to the Christian evidence; but from them I do not quote.

1. I observed that Porphyry does not appear to have repeated the most offensive fictions that had been vented to the prejudice of Christians and Christianity. They had become too stale; time had made those whom they injured better known; and, through the incredulity they would have encountered, there would have been danger that the repetition of them might prejudice the assailant's own cause. But even Porphyry had not learned the language of courtesy in speaking of the long-traduced sect. Even he was willing that the vague odium of a bad name should obstruct its credit and progress. He qualifies it as "the barbarian presumption," and speaks of Origen as having been one of those who "live as Christians, and contrary to the laws,"\* — distinguishing Christians from such as pursue a course of life approved by the laws. And he lends himself to the old charge of their being enemies to the public weal, and provoking the divine displeasure. People should not wonder, he says, "that this sickness has distressed the city for so many years, Æsculapius and the other gods no longer giving their aid. For, since Jesus has been honored, no one has enjoyed any public favor of the gods."†

2. From two passages of Jerome, we learn, that

\* In Euseb. *Hist. Eccl.* Lib. vi. cap. 19.

† In Euseb. *Prepar. Evang.* Lib. v. cap. 1. p. 179. (Edit. Paris, 1628.)

Porphyry, when he spoke of our Lord's miracles, referred them, as others had done, who could not venture to dispute their occurrence, to demoniacal or magical arts. The words of one of those passages are the following ; “ Perhaps, like the Gentiles, and the impious Porphyry and Eunomius, you may pretend that these are but tricks of demons.” \* In the other, having spoken of the labors of the apostles, Jerome goes on ; “ Some one will say, ‘ They did all this for gain’; for so Porphyry says ; ‘ Poor and uncultivated men, when they had nothing, wrought some signs by magical arts. But it is no great thing to work signs. The magicians wrought them in Egypt against Moses. Apollonius wrought them. So did Apuleius. Innumerable persons have done it.’ ” † However it may have been with Celsus, it is likely that Porphyry resorted to this solution in good faith. He is likely to have been an honest believer in the powers of magic ; for, with all his undeniable abilities and learning, it is certain that a childish credulity was his foible. He wrote a life of Pythagoras, who lived eight hundred years before him, and of whom he was a great admirer. In this work he says ; “ If we may believe those who have written con-

\* Hieron. *advers. Vig.* Opp. Tom. I. p. 593. (Edit. Paris, 1609.)

† Id. *Breviarium in Psalterium*. This tract is printed by the Benedictine editors, in whose collection of Jerome's works the passage here quoted may be found in the Appendix to Vol. II, at p. 335. If (which is their opinion) the tract is spurious, and was not written earlier than the sixth century (p. 119), it may still be regarded as good authority respecting a statement in the now lost writings of Porphyry.

cerning him, ancients and deserving of credit, Pythagoras imparted his instructions to brute animals. For he seized the Daunian bear, which had much troubled the neighbours, and, having stroked it awhile, and fed it with bread and acorns, he charged it no more to eat flesh, and let it go ; after which it lived peaceably in the woods and on the mountains, and never more attacked so much as a brute animal. And, when he saw the Tarentine ox roving at pleasure in the fields, and eating green beans, he accosted the herdsman, and desired him to tell the ox, not to eat beans ; and, when he laughed, and said he could not converse with oxen, Pythagoras went up to the ox himself, and whispered in its ear, upon which the ox not only walked out of the field, where the beans were, but never after would eat any.”\* Such was the man,—the writer of this narrative,—whose judgment, if he had exercised it on the subject, had rejected the evidences of the Christian faith. How much easier is it to some minds to believe without evidence than with it ! How strangely alike are skepticism and credulity !

3. Porphyry canvassed at much length the plea set up by Christians for the claims of their religion and its author, on the ground of the fulfilment in them of ancient Jewish prophecies ; and I think it must be owned that he had a great advantage in this argument, by reason of the injudicious and extravagant manner in which it was treated by the

\* Porphyry *de Vita Pythag.* §§ 23, 24. p. 31. (Edit. Amstel.)

Christian writers of his time, who often assumed positions, which it was impossible they should maintain against a learned and acute antagonist. In particular, he laid out his strength upon their interpretations of the book of Daniel, devoting to that discussion one whole book, the twelfth, of his treatise. Respecting his views on this subject we are fully informed by Jerome, in the introduction to his commentary on the book of Daniel. Porphyry argues, chiefly from internal marks, that the book was not written till within about a hundred and fifty years of the time of Jesus, and that it was not designed as a course of prediction of future events, but in great part as a history of the past.

It is out of the question here to enter upon an inquiry of such extent, as that of the authenticity of the book of Daniel, or that of the general and particular correctness of the interpretations of it by early Christian writers. What is chiefly to the purpose here is the remark, that very many of their speculations respecting the sense of Old Testament scripture might be given up as indefensible, — as many in fact ought to be, — and yet the evidence for the divine origin of both the Old and New Testament remain perfectly untouched. Nay, it must be said that they have often embarrassed that evidence, as far as their views have obtained credit, when they have been honestly endeavouring to strengthen it. Nothing is better known, than that, at the present day, equally judicious and competent Christian critics differ in their applications of one or

another Old Testament passage to narratives and statements of the New, and this without affecting at all the certainty of the evidence of either. That the Christian writers of Porphyry's time pressed into the service of the prophetical argument more than could be intelligently put to that use, is what probably all well-qualified Christian expositors of the present day would allow. And as far as we know from the remaining fragments of Porphyry what the arguments of this kind were, which he undertook to refute, I am not going too far when I say, that every one of them might be safely dismissed from the controversy, and the proper, distinctive, Christian evidence remain unassailed and entire.

4. Porphyry founded an objection to Christianity on the fact of its late publication. "If Christ," he said, "declares himself the way of salvation, grace, and truth, and offers a way of return, through himself alone, to believers in him, what was the lot of the many generations of men before him"?\* This is a question which Augustine quotes and answers. And the same argument of his is referred to by Jerome, who writes; "Porphyry is wont to object to us, 'How, from Adam to Moses, and from Moses to the advent of Christ, could the kind and merciful God permit all nations to perish through ignorance of the divine law and commandments? For neither Britain, a country fruitful in tyrants, nor the Scottish races, nor the barbarous tribes all

\* Augustin. *ad Deogratias Epist.* 49. Tom. II. p. 74. (Edit. Paris.)

around to the sea, were acquainted with Moses and the prophets. Why should he appear then in the end of the world, and not before an innumerable multitude of men had perished?"\* To give a full answer to this question, showing, first, how the statement of fact, on which it is founded, needs to be qualified; secondly, that the time of the actual revelation of Christianity was, as far as we have the means of judging, the most seasonable for the accomplishment of its objects; and thirdly, that, as many of my hearers know to be shown at large in the admirable "Analogy" of Bishop Butler, such *a priori* objections, whether we may think them good or bad, belong to a class which would be equally valid against innumerable facts in the established course of nature, where unquestionable experience refutes their validity, and therefore resolve themselves into no objections at all,—to go into this argument would be to allow ourselves to be diverted from our present subject, which is the objections of Porphyry and of his age. Such as the objection is, it has obviously no peculiar force as coming from him or from his time. It is a philosophical objection, and has been repeated by others, who will bring it hereafter before our notice in a more methodical shape.

I dismiss it, in its relation to Porphyry, with the same remark which I had occasion to make before respecting a similar argument on the part of Celsus. This is not the kind of objection, which would have

\* Hieron. *ad Ctesiph. advers. Pelagium* (Tom. I. p. 813.)

been resorted to by skilful reasoners, who, in that early time, when the recent facts of Christianity admitted of easy investigation, felt themselves to be in possession of any thing which could be plausibly said in contradiction of those alleged facts. Celsus lived in the century after the first publication of our religion ; Porphyry, a century later ; that is, the last of these writers was in mature life as near to Paul in point of time as we are to the settlers of Plymouth, the first was as near to John as we to the beginning of the American Revolution. If there were facts to refute the story of Christians, they were facts accessible to men standing in such a position ; had they possessed any such facts, they would have produced them ; had they supposed such facts were to be had, they would have sought them. They would not then have been at all disposed to have recourse to an objection, which no mind except of a certain degree of reflection would entertain ; which a carefully reflecting mind would reject as untenable ; and which with no mind of any description would have any thing like the weight of an exposure of the alleged substantive facts. When I have evidence to produce showing that such and such things did not occur, or rendering it doubtful whether they did occur, I do not perplex the question with arguments (even if I imagine I have good ones) respecting their abstract fitness as parts of the general plan of Providence. Celsus and Porphyry would not have done it, had it been in their power to do better.

5. Porphyry also imitates Celsus in the endeavour to point out inconsistencies and contradictions in the New Testament books ; a kind of unsuccessful minute criticism, in which, as things have turned out, he has made a material contribution to the evidence of the truth he was assailing, by showing that those books were in his hands the same that they are in ours. I give but a few examples.

Jerome reports that Porphyry, not counting, as he should have done, the name of Jechoniah, in the genealogy at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel, as both the end of the second class of fourteen, and the beginning of the third, had charged Matthew with an erroneous enumeration.\* Upon the text in the same book, where it is said, that "Jesus saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of custom, and he said to him 'Follow me,' and he arose and followed him," Porphyry remarked to the effect of its being incredible, that men should follow any one who merely called them ; forgetting, as Jerome says, "what signs and wonders had preceded, which, without doubt, the apostles had witnessed, before they believed."† "That it might be fulfilled," says Matthew (referring to the seventy-eighth Psalm), "which was spoken by the prophet, 'I will open my mouth in parables.' " Some manuscript copies, still extant, exhibit the reading, "That it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by

\* Hieron. *in Daniel.* i. 1. (Tom. II. p. 1023.)

† Id. *in Mat.* ix. 9. (Tom. III. p. 616.)

the prophet Isaiah.” Such a copy, it appears, was in the hands of Porphyry, which gave him occasion to complain of Matthew, as having ascribed to Isaiah words of which Asaph was the author.\* Comparing the introductions to the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, he made a similar objection to a verse of the latter, in which is apparently ascribed to Isaiah language really taken from Malachi.† He finds fault that Jesus is represented to have walked upon the sea, when the lake of Gennesareth was intended, as if the word *sea* were used by way of increasing the wonder;‡ that Jesus is said to have refused to accompany his brethren to Jerusalem to the feast of tabernacles, and afterwards made the journey alone, at which, says Jerome, “Porphyry barks, charging Jesus with inconstancy and caprice;”§ and that Jesus threatened the wicked with everlasting punishment, and at the same time said, “With what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again,” as if the execution of the threat in the former words would be a violation of the principle in the latter.|| Once more; he has much to say of disagreements among the early preachers of the faith, as between Paul and Peter, between Paul, Barnabas, and Mark, and between the parties who became excited against one another respecting the terms of the introduction of Gentiles

\* Hieron. *Breviar. in Psalm.* (Ubi supra, p. 316.)

† Id. *in Mat.* iii. 3. (Tom. III. p. 590.)

‡ Id. *Quæstion. in Genes.* (Tom. I. p. 1311.)

§ Id. *Dialog. advers. Pelag.* Lib. ii. (Tom. I. p. 864.)

|| Augustin. *ad Deogratias. Epist.* 49. (Tom. II. p. 77.)

into the church. He did not observe that these were but the temporary dissensions of honest men, such as were altogether to be expected under the new and extraordinary circumstances in which they were placed, deranging many of their old habits of thought; and especially he did not observe what force the fact which gave him such offence actually lends to an important point in the evidences of our faith, in the way of refuting the supposition of a conspiracy among its early friends. Wicked plots will not endure the trial of sharp feuds among the confederates. “Porphyry argues,” says Jerome, “the falsehood of the whole doctrine, . . . . because the chiefs of the churches disagreed.”\* More cautious reasoners will think that the same fact well sustains the opposite inference.

I pass from the consideration of these objections of Porphyry, after merely recalling attention, in a word, to their bearing upon the great question of the genuineness of the New Testament books. Of course, every instance in which he has subjected those books to criticism, commenting on passages which we now read in them, goes just so far to show that they were in his hands what they are in ours. It appears that he did employ this criticism to a much greater extent than is indicated by the existing remains of his works, and that the books which he understood to be the authoritative books of Christians were the same which were regarded in that light by the Christian fathers. “There are

\* Hieron. *Proœm. in Epist. ad Gal.* (Tom. III. p. 862.)

in the Holy Scriptures innumerable passages," says Jerome,—and Jerome was not at all treating our argument,—“ which Porphyry has cavilled at, for want of understanding them.”\* If he criticized so many, he had them before him to criticize.

I have but a few words to say respecting the state of the controversy at the close of the third century, as some light is thrown upon it in the work of the Christian father Arnobius. His time is not precisely ascertained, but the best opinion is that he wrote not more than five or six years earlier or later than the year 300. He had been bred an idolater, and, after his conversion, wrote a treatise in seven books, entitled “ Against the Gentiles.” He was a man of learning, and wrote in a spirited and nervous, though not generally an attractive or graceful style. He argues judiciously in favor of Christianity from various considerations; as, from its intrinsic excellence, as compared with all other systems of religious belief; from what had been already experienced, on a large scale, of its convincing, converting, reforming, and spiritualizing power; from the perfection of the character of Jesus, and especially from his miraculous works, established, as to their actual occurrence, by the unquestionable testimony of men who knew what they had seen, and who had no motive but love of truth and righteousness for publishing their doctrine, and every possible worldly motive to suppress it. But what we are concerned rather to notice is, those objec-

\* Hieron. *in Epist. ad Galat.* ii. 11. (Tom. III. p. 880.)

tions of unbelief, which, living when he did, he esteemed it most pertinent to consider.

1. In the first place, though he does not refer to any continued currency of the worst imputations which had been cast upon the company of believers in the earlier ages,—imputations which, it is reasonable to presume, had by this time gone out of credit, (though not out of memory, as we may hereafter see,)—he does allude to the prejudices still attempted to be kept up against the sect, by denouncing them as impious and irreligious men, atheists,\* disturbers of the public peace, and authors, through the provocation which their apostasy offered to the gods, of all the disasters that afflicted mankind. “As I have fallen in with some,” he says, in giving an account of the occasion of his work by way of introduction, “who assert that, since the Christian community appeared, the world is ruined, and the human race visited with every kind of calamity, and that the gods themselves, since those rites are deserted through the medium of which they were used to communicate with mortals, are banished from our earthly regions, I have determined, after the poor measure of my power, to endeavour to counteract this scandal, and remove the odium under which we Christians unjustly labor, that they may not flatter themselves with too great success, while they bandy about these popular slanders, nor think that they have gained their point, because

\* *Adversus Gentes.* Lib. iii. § 28. (p. 125. Edit. Orellii.)

we abstain from such altercations.”\* This was what Arnobius felt himself called upon to meet, as champion of the Christian body,—an unreasonable estranging odium, not an argument upon the merits of the case;—a blind hatred, sedulously instilled, of the persons and the cause of Christians, such as forbade an examination of their pretensions; not a dissatisfaction, subsequent to inquiry, with the sufficiency of the evidence which sustained them. Further on he says, “We are pronounced stupid, stolid, infatuated, dunces, yea, mere brutes, because we have devoted ourselves to God, by whose will and decree every thing which is, subsists.”† Again; “Will you still maintain,” he asks, “that we belong to an impious fraternity, because with venerable forms of worship we address the chief and stay of the universe? Will you say that we therefore deserve to be reproached by you as wretched, godless men?”‡ Once more, in the introduction to the sixth book; “In this account you have fastened on us the gross charge of impiety, because we do not build temples for the offices of our worship, nor frame material images of any of the gods, . . . . nor pour out the blood of animals.”§ But it would be superfluous to collect further examples of the appeals to popular prejudice, with which the Christian cause is represented as assailed, at the time when this defence was composed. They are scattered over all parts of the treatise.

\* *Advers. Gent.* Lib. i. § 1. (p. 3.)

‡ Ibid. § 29. (p. 19.)

† Ibid. § 28. (p. 18.)

§ Ibid. Lib. vi. § 1. (p. 202.)

2. It was objected to the religion, that it was but of recent origin. For instance, in the second book ; “ You are in the habit of objecting to us, that this faith of ours is modern, and originated only a short time ago, and that you cannot forsake for it the ancient faith which came to you from your fathers.”\* Arnobius has made some judicious observations, exposing the weakness of this plea. He might advantageously have added another. If the religion was of recent origin, so much the greater were the facilities for detecting any thing falsely pretended in its history. If it had been published but a short time before,—“ a few days ” is the expression,—they who rejected it had the less excuse for taking any other way to justify their unbelief than that of simply showing that there had been an attempt at a bold fraud upon the world.

3. It was asked, in the time of Arnobius, why Christ was sent no earlier, if he were sent at all, and why the revelation through him was not at once made universal,—questions, respecting which all that it would belong to this place to say, has been already said under the corresponding head of the extracts from Porphyry. Arnobius answers in some excellent remarks, which might be well quoted, if this were the time for the discussion. I may add, however, that Arnobius well retorts these questions upon the opponent, in the way of an argument *ad hominem*. “ I will ask you too,” he says, “ if your god Hercules was to be born, or

\* *Advers. Gent.* Lib. ii. § 66. (p. 97.)

Æsculapius, or Mercury, or Bacchus, or other benefactors of mankind, why were they sent so late, so that the most ancient ages did not know them? Do you say that there was some good reason? You must own then that there might have been a good one for the late coming of Jesus the Saviour.”\*

4. Exception was taken to the alleged circumstances of the life and death of Jesus, to the effect, that his humble condition and ignominious fate were inconsistent with the decencies of the sublime office which he was said to have been sent to execute. “The gods are not incensed against you,” Arnobius represents the opponent as saying, “because you adore the omnipotent, but because you insist, that one born a man, and,—a thing infamous for the vilest persons,—put to death on a cross, was a god, and now lives again.”†

5. The Christian doctrine of the resurrection was a stumbling-block to those for whom Arnobius argued, as we saw that it had been long before to Trypho the Jew. This point is set forth in his work in various particulars.‡

6. Once more; Arnobius instructs us, in accordance with what we have seen of earlier times, how the argument from miracles was disposed of by unbelievers of his day. Having introduced that subject, he says, “Perhaps some one will meet us with the stale and puerile calumny, ‘Jesus was a magician;

\* *Advers. Gent.* Lib. ii. § 74. (p. 104.)

† *Ibid.* Lib. i. §§ 36, 40. (pp. 23, 27.)

‡ *Ibid.* Lib. ii. § 13, 14, 15, 26, 34. (pp. 57—59, 67, 72, 73.)

he performed all those works by clandestine arts; from the recesses of Egypt he stole the names of powerful angels, and the secrets of foreign science.' . . . . Can you pretend, then, that his deeds were the enchantments of demons, were the achievements of magical arts? Can you indicate to us any one, can you point out one among all the sorcerers that ever lived, who wrought any thing in a thousandth part so marvellous as what was done by Christ? . . . . Who does not know, that whatever they do, they do in such and such ways [which he specifies], while, as to Christ, all that he did, he did without any instrumentality, without the observance of any rites or ceremonies, and merely by the authority of his own name?"\* He then, in a passage of great eloquence, recites a variety of the miracles of Jesus, and contrasts them with works of others which might seem of a like character, concluding with calling attention to the fact, that he not only did such wonders himself, but communicated the power of doing them to others, his disciples. And the reason alleged by Arnobius for his proceeding thus, is what in the present connexion particularly demands our notice. "When he foresaw that the true character of his wonderful works would be disputed, in order to dispel the suspicion of their being done by magical art, he selected to himself from the immense body of the people, who followed his steps with wonder, fishermen, laborers, rustics, and other

\* *Advers. Gent.* Lib. i. §§ 43, 44. (p. 29.)

unlearned men of that rank, who, being sent abroad into various countries, should, as he had done, perform such wonders without recourse to any of the expedients of art. . . . Nor was any thing done by himself to the astonishment of all spectators, which he did not cause to be equally done by the agency of those inconsiderable and uninstructed men.”\* I need not say that we are not here concerned to defend the precise ground which the reasoning of Arnobius occupies. The material thing, rendered apparent by the course of his discussion is, that the argument of unbelief in his day was not aimed against the fact of the miracles of Jesus, but labored to explain them on a different hypothesis from that of their being testimonials of a divine interposition.

In short, as far as we have yet proceeded, we have met with nothing, in the ages whence it ought to be furnished, if from any, to discredit the proper, direct, historical evidence for our religion.

I proceed, in my next Lecture, to some account of the state of the controversy in the fourth century, as exhibited in the writings of the philosopher Hierocles, and the Emperor Julian.

\* *Advers. Gent.* Lib. i. § 50. (p. 34.)

## LECTURE XIII.

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### GROUNDS OF PAGAN UNBELIEF.

[CONTINUED.]

IN the course of two hundred and fifty years' preaching to the Gentiles, that is, by the beginning of the fourth century, Christianity had made such progress in the polished and learned circles of society, as not only to forbid its being disposed of any longer by mere calumny, contempt, and outrage, but also to attract such attention to its proper, direct evidence, that of the miraculous works of its author, that this topic could no longer be passed over with the slight notice hitherto given to it by opponents of the faith.

The philosophers of the New Platonic, or Eclectic, school, who had become the chief adversaries of Christianity, both estimating the force of this argument, and witnessing its extensive actual effect, addressed themselves to meet it in such a manner as might best promise to influence the popular mind. Porphyry himself had, in the previous cen-

tury, in his “Life of Pythagoras,” ascribed miraculous works to that ancient, though it does not distinctly appear that he intended his narrative to furnish an argument bearing on the Christian evidences. This method of reasoning, however, was expressly brought forward, and mainly relied upon, by Hierocles, the next assailant of our religion, whose writings we are to consider. The principal aim of his work was to present the wonderful things related of Apollonius Tyanæus, as affording a parallel to the miracles of Jesus.

Apollonius, a native of Tyana, a city of Cappadocia, lived in the first century; but the precise time of either his birth or his death is not known. The account of him which furnished Hierocles with his materials, and which is still extant, was composed in Greek, by the sophist Philostratus of Lemnos, in eight books. Philostratus died in the year 244, and is believed to have written the work now in question some thirty years before, or something more than a hundred years later than the time of Apollonius. In the introduction to his work, he gives a particular account of the occasion of his composing it, and the nature of his materials. He says, that, being at Rome, the Empress Julia, wife of the Emperor Severus, placed in his hands certain papers relating to the life of Apollonius, and from them directed him to compile a history. The papers proved to consist of memoirs of Apollonius, purporting to have been prepared by a certain Damis, who had accompanied him on his travels;

and they were said to have been presented to the Empress by some third person, whom Philostratus does not name.\* The work was not so much to the purpose of Hierocles, even supposing it to have been a work of authority, as has seemed to have been commonly understood, made up as it is, not so much of accounts of wonderful things done by Apollonius, as of wonderful things witnessed by him in his peregrinations in distant countries. It can in fact be no more correctly described than as a fabulous book of travels, resembling, for instance, the journeys of Sir John Mandeville, if one should not rather compare it to the voyages of Gulliver. Let a statement of some of its contents show whether there is injustice in this comparison.

Apollonius, the son of a family of consideration at Tyana,† and educated under the care of philosophers adhering to the different sects of the day, attached himself to the tenets and discipline of the Pythagoreans, ‡ and adopted their ascetic modes of life. He observed a vegetable diet, went barefoot, suffered his hair to grow, § and for five years continued speechless.|| In imitation of Pythagoras, he resolved to travel in remote regions, and, his disciples refusing to accompany him, he set out attended by two servants.¶ At Nineveh, he attached to him Damis, a citizen of that place, whom he

\* *De Vita Apollonii.* Lib. i. cap. 3. (p. 5.)

† Ibid. Lib. i. cap. iv. (p. 6.)

‡ Ibid. cap. vii. (pp. 8, 9.)

§ Ibid. cap. viii. (p. 10.)

|| Ibid. cap. xiv. (p. 16.)

¶ Ibid. cap. xviii. (pp. 22, 23.)

assured that he was acquainted with all human languages, though he had never learned them, and could converse with brute animals.\* Proceeding on their way, they came to a region inhabited by men four cubits, and five cubits high.† They told of beasts, resembling lions, with a human head;‡ a seal, which, having lost its young, fasted three days for grief;§ a city which was impregnable, because defended against enemies, not with common arms, but with thunder and lightning;|| a river, in which were fish called *peacocks* from their resemblance to that bird, having purple crests, party-colored scales, and golden tails which they could turn in all directions.¶ They met with griffins and pygmies.\*\* They came where were dragons, which the inhabitants hunted for the sake of a stone of wonderful virtue in their heads;†† and in the chase they fascinated those animals with music. They told of a city, whose inhabitants understood the language of beasts;‡‡ and of two precious casks possessed by the Indians, of which if in a time of drought they opened one, copious rains immediately followed; if they closed it, the rain forthwith ceased. If the other was opened, it would raise a hurricane; if it was closed, the winds would be hushed. §§ They were invited to a feast, at which there was no need of

\* *De Vitâ Appollonii.* Lib. i. cap. 19. (p. 23.) Lib. iv. cap. 3. (p. 142.)

† Ibid. Lib. ii. cap. 4. (p. 52.) ‡ Ibid. Lib. iii. cap. 45. (p. 132.)

§ Ibid. Lib. ii. cap. 14. (p. 66.) ¶ Ibid. cap. 33. (p. 86.)

¶ Ibid. Lib. iii. cap. 1. (p. 95.) \*\* Ibid. capp. 47, 48. (pp. 133, 134.)

†† Ibid. capp. 6, 7, 8. (pp. 98—100.) ‡‡ Ibid. cap. 9. (p. 101.)

§§ Ibid. Lib. iii. cap. 14. (p. 404.)

attendance; but the seats, the dishes, the plates, and drinking vessels, all presented themselves as they were wanted, waiting on the entertainment themselves, and passing from place to place, as the guests required them.\*

From the first three of the eight books of which the work of Philostratus consists, I have thus given a few specimens of its contents. They are sufficient to show its character. Whoever it was that first brought together its materials, it is clear that it was a mere wild romance. Among the many extraordinary things which Apollonius is related to have seen and heard on his voyages, it might be expected that place would be found for some that he had done. He is said to have possessed the power of foretelling future events; yet at the same time it is related that he carefully composed an account of himself to deliver to Domitian, not foreseeing, what proved to be the fact, that Domitian would not suffer him to pronounce it.† He interpreted the chirping of birds, having learned their language, as he said, during a residence in Arabia, from persons who had themselves acquired it by eating dragons' hearts.‡ At the tomb of Achilles, he conversed,—without witnesses, however,—with the ghost of that hero.§ He vanished away, in the presence of all the great men of Rome, when brought to trial before Domitian.|| In the

\* *De Vitâ Appollonii.* Lib. iii. cap. 27. (pp. 117, 118.)

† Ibid. Lib. viii. cap. 6. (p. 326.)

‡ Ibid. Lib. i. cap. 20. (p. 25.) Lib. iii. cap. 9. (p. 101.)

§ Ibid. Lib. iv. cap. 15. (p. 151.) || Ibid. Lib. viii. cap. 4, 5. (p. 324.)

midst of an harangue at Ephesus, he stopped short and exclaimed “Down with the tyrant,” at the very instant, as it afterwards proved, when Domitian was slain at Rome.\* Ten months after his death, he appeared in a dream to a young man, one of his followers, who had doubted of the immortality of the soul.†

It is obvious to remark, that, if the work of Philostratus had been of a different character from what I have represented it,—if, instead of relating all sorts of wonders seen and heard of by him in his distant travels, it had confined itself to a relation of wonders which he wrought,—it would have been a work altogether without historical authority, by reason of the circumstances of its composition. When we treat of the evidence of the miraculous works of Jesus, we consider it an all-important preliminary to show, that the testimony to them comes on the authority of witnesses so situated as to be able to know the truth of what they undertake to report; in other words, that the Gospels were written by eye and ear witnesses of the deeds and discourses of Jesus, and companions of eye and ear witnesses. Apollonius of Tyana was a follower of the rule of Pythagoras in the first century; but Philostratus, in the third, was the first to make him a considerable man. Celsus, the heathen assailant of our religion in the second century, does not mention his name, though, had the afterwards

\* *De Vita Apollonii*, Lib. viii. cap. 26. (p. 367.)

† Ibid. cap. 31. (p. 370.)

received accounts of him, true or false, had then any circulation, it would have been to the purpose of Celsus, as well as to that of Hierocles, to introduce him into the controversy. By Lucian he is mentioned about the year 170, but not favorably,\* and also by another profane writer of that period.† There is not found any notice of him by any of the Christian fathers before Origen, though in that time lived many distinguished for learning, and well informed of whatever there was to influence the popular mind against their faith; as Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Irenæus, and Tertullian. Origen merely refers to him in a sentence or two, as a magician and philosopher, but without a hint of his having been brought, in any quarter, into comparison with Jesus.‡ By and by came Philostratus more than a hundred years after his death, and commemorated him in an elaborate biography.

And how did Philostratus obtain his facts, so to call them? He is candid enough to inform his readers, being willing, as one is half inclined to think, after doing a piece of task work for an imperial patron, to put them on their guard respecting the credit due to his story. In the following passage, beginning the third chapter of his first book, he answers the question, which every reader, inquisitive respecting the authority of his history as a work of credit, sees to be the material one. “Damis,” says

\* *Pseudomantis*, § 5. (Tom. V. p. 69. Edit. Bipont.)

† L. Apuleii *Apologia*. (p. 544, Edit. Paris, 1688.)

‡ *Contra Cels.* Lib. vi. § 41. (p. 662.)

he, “was a man not without sense, who once dwelt at old Nineveh. He was an adherent of Apollonius in his philosophy, and wrote an account of his travels, in which he says he was his companion, and recorded his opinions, his discourses, and predictions. A certain friend of Damis brought these memoranda, not hitherto publicly known, to the knowledge of the Empress Julia; and, I at that time being entertained at her court (for she was studious of the art of rhetoric), she gave me her commands to transcribe those narratives, and reduce them to a proper shape. For the Ninevite had written them with intelligence, but not with skill. I likewise fell in with the book of a certain Maximus of Ægis, containing an account of Apollonius’s doings in that city. Apollonius also wrote his will, from which one may learn how devoted he was to philosophy. As to the work of Moeragene, who wrote four books on Apollonius, no stress is to be laid upon it, as he was ignorant of many events in the life of his hero. Thus have I explained how I collected these scattered documents, and how I came to dispose them as I have done.”

Such is the candid account, which Philostrates himself gives of his historical authorities. Is it too bold a conjecture, that, while he could not refuse to gratify a romantic female sovereign, with whose patronage and friendship he was honored, by making up for her a tale of wonders on which her heart was bent, from sketches of which she understood herself to be the sole possessor, he yet

intended to save his credit with cooler and more impartial readers in after times, by frankly informing them that he did not put forth the tale on his own veracity? He had a will of Apollonius in his hands, he says in the passage which I have quoted. And how did that serve him in his work? Merely, as appears from his own statement, to show how devoted Apollonius was to philosophy. He had also, he says, fallen in with a book containing an account of the doings of Apollonius at Ægis; but this, whatever were its contents or authority, does not appear to have furnished any contribution to his list of wonders. There had been a previous life of Apollonius, by one Mœrاغenes; and this, it seems, of some pretension, for it was written in four books. But of this, says Philostratus, “no account is to be made.” Why? Because it had too fabulous an air, and was therefore to be regarded with suspicion? Not at all, but for a different reason. Because, says Philostratus, “Mœrاغenes was unacquainted with many things concerning Apollonius.” That is,—to put the fair construction upon the words,—Mœrاغenes lent no authority to such a work as Philostratus was expected to compose. He had written the life of Apollonius, the philosopher; not of Apollonius, the wonder-worker or the wonder-seer.

The remaining authority was the collection of the notes of Damis, which Philostratus had been desired to copy out and digest. And who was Damis? It does not appear that any thing was

known of him, except on the statement of a person, who himself does not appear to have been known so much as by name to Philostratus,—a certain friend or relation of Damis, who brought these documents not yet known, and presented them to the Empress Julia.

The true account of the matter, could we get at the particulars, would probably prove to be, that some relative or pretended relative of a person who either had or had not been an attendant on Apollonius, being acquainted with the *dilettanti* tastes of the Empress, and knowing that nothing is lost by making presents to sovereigns of what gratifies their fancy or their vanity, composed these (so styled) *notes* of Damis for the purpose. If the Empress did not suspect, or profess herself to suspect, the fraud, it was not for the courtier Philostratus to do either. It was but for him to take the materials, and execute the work expected of him.

Am I making a supposition in the least degree violent? Am I making any but what is the most natural? I submit it to any reasonable mind, whether this is not the construction, which, with the facts before it, independently of all regard to bearings on Christianity or on any thing else, a reasonable mind feels itself impelled to put on the transaction. For our present purpose it would suffice to stop far short of this, and simply to say, that in such a case no credit can be given to a history professedly composed more than a century after the events which it records, on no better authority than

that of a person, who had said that the documents in his possession were prepared by an eye-witness ; a person too, who is not so much as named ; who was not known, as far as appears, to the writer of the history of which his papers became the basis ; and who also, as far as appears, did not subject himself to any hazard or inconvenience in making a false assertion of their authenticity.

Though I have made these remarks on the occasion and origin of the life of Apollonius by Philostratus, depriving it of all credit as a piece of true history, I cannot but think, that whoever will examine it will be inclined to pronounce them superfluous. When I first looked into it, I was surprised to find how little its tenor and contents recommended it for the use to which it was put by Hierocles in the Christian controversy. From his argument, and the remarks which I had seen upon it, I had supposed that Philostratus had represented his hero as distinguished by a supernatural knowledge and power above the sons of men, and so far, at least, as presenting a parallel to the master of Christians. But the actual case is far different. Apollonius is indeed represented as having done some marvellous things, but not nearly as many as he is said to have witnessed. On the showing of his own biographer, Apollonius was not nearly so much of a wonder-worker, as of a wonder-seer. Here the parallel with Jesus utterly fails.

Nay, more ; granting all related of Apollonius to be true, and the one fact would defeat the other in

respect to any attempt to ascribe to him a peculiar character. What was averred of Jesus by his disciples was, that he did mighty works which none could do, unless God, after a special manner, were with him. What was averred of Apollonius was, that though he did wonders, they were not so many as were done by other men in distant regions where he travelled ; and that the aggregate of those done by him and them both, did not equal that of those witnessed by him in one and another place, which were not of a nature to be traced to any human instrumentality. And this fact, I may remark in passing (though the point does not particularly concern us), seems to me to settle a question, which has been discussed, whether Philostratus, as well as Hierocles after him, intended to set up Apollonius as a rival to Jesus. Philostratus not only has not made the most distant allusion to Jesus from first to last,—which it would have been by no means unnatural to do, had he but regarded the cases as being in any degree similar,—but, had his purpose been what has been supposed, I cannot but think that he would have at least omitted very much of what he has recorded ; in short, that he would have composed a materially different book. It must, on the contrary, I think, be regarded as matter of surprise, that a work so little suited to the use to which it has been applied by Hierocles, should have been selected by that writer for the purpose ; and we are led to conclude that the necessity of some movement of the

kind must have been strongly felt, when it prompted a resort to so poor an expedient.

To this use, however, the work of Philostratus was in fact put by Hierocles, who lived early in the century after him; and, whatever we may think, after these explanations, of his argument, it seems to have been regarded, by the Christian fathers, as the master-stroke of the New Platonists against Christianity. Hierocles, who, from the account of him by Lactantius, a Christian father of the same time, appears to have been a person high in office, urged his plea in a treatise, now lost, in two books, addressed “To the Christians.” It was soon answered by Eusebius, (in a short piece, though divided, like that of Philostratus, into eight books), which is still extant among the works of that father; and there is also a strain of remark upon it, at some length, in the fifth book of the “Institutes” of Lactantius. From these two sources we obtain ample information concerning the lost treatise of Hierocles.

Eusebius confines himself to an exposure of the absurdity of his comparison of Apollonius to Christ. He says, in the introduction to his work, that Hierocles had used other arguments against Christianity, but the consideration of these he expressly waves, they having been, as he says, merely borrowed word for word from Celsus, and so refuted long ago by Origen.\* In the passage already re-

\* *In Hieroclem.* cap. 1.

ferred to in the “Institutes” of Lactantius, that father enables us to supply this chasm, or rather to judge of the correctness of the general statement made by Eusebius. “The writer,” says Lactantius, who does not happen to name Hierocles, though he describes him and his work, in a manner fully indicating who is meant, “endeavoured to show the sacred Scriptures to be false by reason of the contradictions with which they abound. He particularly produced several texts as inconsistent with each other; and indeed, so many did he enumerate, and so distinctly, that one might suspect he had at some time professed the religion which he now exposed. .... And he spoke of the disciples as being rude and unlearned men.”\*

After what has been already said upon the character of such objections, it would be useless repetition, in this stage of our remarks, to add any thing beyond two brief observations to our notice of this writer. The first is, that, from the very nature of the argument from the case of Apollonius, it appears that the reality of the miracles of Jesus as facts was either admitted, or, at least, not disputed by Hierocles; and this, indeed, is urged by Lactantius, where he says, “When the writer would overthrow the miraculous works of Jesus, yet would not deny their reality, he proposed to show that Apollonius had done as great or greater.”† The

\* Lactant. *Institutiones*, Lib. v. cap. 2. (Tom. I. p. 332. edit. Bipont.)

† Ibid. cap. 3. (p. 333.)

second remark is, that Hierocles had the same book, of New Testament scripture in his hands as the Christian fathers of his time, and considered them, as they did, of paramount authority in the Church. Says Lactantius, who could not of course have had any such object in making the remark as we have in quoting it, “ So many texts did he enumerate, and that with such exactness, that he might seem to have been at some time a believer.” Every individual criticism of his, of this kind, recognised by his Christian opponent as being made upon a text which Christians owned, was another proof, from the most satisfactory source, that the books which we now receive, and no other, were the books then held in universal reverence by disciples.

I am to speak of but one more antagonist of Christianity during the period of its early struggles. In the fourth century its worldly condition and prospects, if such an expression be allowable, were changed. It had forced itself into reception with the unpretending mass of the people of the vast Roman empire, carrying a sensible improvement of manners, and elevation of society, in its train. It had entered the schools of philosophy, and occupied with a new strain of grave and attractive eloquence their high places of instruction. It had seated itself in the chambers of imperial council ; and at length, in the person of Constantine, it had ascended the throne of the Cæsars. But that place was not to be yielded to it without another conflict.

Paganism was still tenacious of its doomed life. Julian, the nephew of Constantine, and his successor in the purple at the third remove, made another resolute attempt to suppress Christianity by his influence and authority, and to refute it by his arguments. As a writer against that religion, to say nothing of his imperial rank, his name is to be mentioned along with those of Celsus, Porphyry, and Hierocles, as one of the most conspicuous of the first four centuries.

The character of Julian is one of those, occasionally occurring in history, concerning which the most irreconcilable opinions are expressed by different parties of such as from their position might be supposed competent to form a trustworthy judgment. The Pagan writers of his own and the following times are lavish of commendations of him, as combining all qualities suitable for example and command ; while the Christians, under a bias perhaps equally natural, saw little in him but what went to characterize a cunning, obstinate, and active devotee to the falsehoods of the old religion. He is the hero of the modern historian of the “Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,” who, though too skilful to provoke incredulity by representing him as faultless, takes manifest delight in depicting him as well-nigh the model of a just, valiant, wise, and philosophical patriot prince. The bias under which Gibbon viewed his character is as evident as that of the writers hostile to Christianity near the Emperor’s own time, but not so consistent and reason-

able as theirs ; for the philosophical enemy to all religion should have been as much offended by the bigoted devotion of Julian to the Pagan fables, as by what he esteemed the bigoted devotion of the opponents of Julian to the equally fabulous Christian faith. But the modern skeptic easily overlooked the superstitions of the ancient Pagan votary, in his sympathy with the objects of the sworn foe of the religion of Jesus ; and the imagination of the enthusiastic scholar was taken captive by the ostentations of one, who, through his reign of eighteen months, professed to hold the straining forces of the Roman empire with a never-slackened rein, while his mind and time were chiefly employed with spiritual contemplations, and the elegant pursuits of letters and philosophy.

A cool survey of the character of Julian rejects the estimate of his partial historian. The Emperor was one of that not small class of men, who possess extraordinary qualities, without possessing them in that well-proportioned combination, in that union with others equally or more important, or under the control of that sound wisdom and those high motives, which are necessary to justify an ascription to them of the rare character of greatness. Might I be permitted to have recourse, for what may seem, at first view, a singular analogy, to our own New-England history, I would hazard the remark, that Julian seems to me a sort of young Cotton Mather in armour. He had courage and energy, no doubt ; great love of learning, activity of mind, and

powers of application and acquisition. On the other hand, he was restlessly ambitious ; childishly vain ; superstitious to a madness ; pedantic and ostentatious, in his own whimsical way, to a folly. What were called his temperance and aversion to luxury, though unquestionably real as habits, would be better described as a parade of those austeries and mortifications, which, witnessed in men whom luxury solicits, never fail of their reward in the flattering amazement of the undiscerning vulgar. He was stained neither with libertinism nor with blood, at a time when for a prince not to be both a murderer and a debauchee was a singularly reputable thing. He even resembled the extraordinary person, to whom I have ventured to compare him, in a certain grotesque and fantastic humor,—not to call it wit,—of which one hesitates whether most to find fault with the temper or the taste. His life was all an exhibition ; and if any thing like the speech related by Gibbon, on the authority of Ammianus, his friend and biographer, to have been addressed by him to his friends and officers, after his mortal wound, was actually pronounced by him, it was but the last fitting scene of a pompous spectacle. Indeed, the historian suggests, without appearing to be himself struck with the peculiarity of the intimation as affording a commentary on the character which he extols, that the elaborate oration, said to have been pronounced by the Emperor on his death-bed, had been previously composed.\*

\* *History of the Decline and Fall, &c.* chap. 24, note 95.

With all its brilliancy and force, the submission of a mind like that of Julian to Christianity, would have been an exceedingly equivocal homage to that religion. Considering his own tendencies and the circumstances of his early life, it remains no mystery how he was repelled from it. His family had fallen victims to the jealous cruelty of the house of Constantine; and the inexpiable wrongs which he resented, from the first sovereign disciples to Christianity, naturally led him to hate the religion which they so unworthily professed. The methods, adopted by an unskilful policy to tame his chafed spirit, did but exasperate, if not strengthen it, the more. He was placed, under a watch of vexatious and mortifying strictness, in the hands of Christian teachers, to be reared as an ecclesiastic; and at twenty years of age he was in orders as a reader in the church of Nicomedia. His studies, pursued with a well-feigned zeal, had at once nourished his antipathy to the faith, which, as he believed, was designed to be used to fetter and degrade and spoil him of his birthright, and given him preparation for such championship against it as mere ignorance of it could never execute. Meanwhile the Pagan sophists saw their advantage. They watched the discontent of the youth who might one day sway the destinies of Rome and of the world, and by well-devised addresses to his master-passions, especially by applications to that vanity through which he was so singularly susceptible of influence, they suc-

ceeded in making him their own. At twenty years of age, Julian was already a fanatical devotee to the Pagan faith; though for ten years longer, and till he was above the fear of consequences, he concealed his apostasy, from all but a few favored friends, with a severe dissimulation. Thus long, to use the language of Gibbon, “as soon as he had satisfied the obligation of assisting, on solemn festivals, at the assemblies of the Christians, Julian returned, with the impatience of a lover, to burn his free and voluntary incense on the domestic chapels of Jupiter and Mercury.”\* The kind of flattery with which he had been plied into this state of exaltation, and the nature of the exercises of his own erratic mind, prepared for them by his courses of fasts and vigils, may be inferred from the account of his friend, the orator Libanius. “Julian,” says he, “lived in a perpetual intercourse with the gods and goddesses; they descended upon earth to enjoy the conversation of their favorite hero; they gently interrupted his slumbers by touching his hand or his hair; they warned him of every impending danger, and conducted him, by their infallible wisdom, in every action of his life; and he had acquired such an intimate knowledge of his heavenly guests, as readily to distinguish the voice of Jupiter from that of Minerva, and the form of Apollo from the figure of Hercules.”†

\* *History of the Decline and Fall, &c.* chap. 23. (juxta not. 29.)

† *Ibid.* (juxta not. 26.)

It was, of course, a darling object with Julian to restore the ascendancy of the lately discredited polytheism of the Roman state. His eulogists extol the moderation of his exercise of the imperial authority to that end. It is not at all necessary to our purpose to question that this clemency, to the degree that it can be made out, was a dictate of the better part of the Emperor's nature ; though it is plain, that mere considerations of policy would have prompted to the same course ; for,—not to say that the violent forms of persecution had been fully tried by his predecessors, and that not only without avail, but to the manifest advantage of what they had aimed to oppress,—it was out of the question to attempt a repetition of such cruelties, when Christianity had lately been, and, but for accident in the imperial succession, would now be, in a condition to proscribe the temples ; and when the camps, the cities, the senate, and the schools were filled with Christian professors. On the other hand, it could have been no very honest,—at any rate, no very enlarged or consistent,—purpose of toleration, which, while it professed to exempt Christians from any forfeiture, by reason of their profession, of life, limb, or estate, excluded them from civil and military trusts, laid them and their youth under social disabilities (as by excluding them from instruction in the schools of literature and philosophy), and did not scruple to avail itself of opportunities to injure the religion by fixing on plausible pretexts of some other offence in its pro-

fessors. The sort of address, if so it is to be called, with which this was done, well illustrates the singular character we are considering. “I think it absurd,” says Julian in one of his decrees, “for such as explain the works of Homer, Hesiod, Demosthenes, Herodotus, Thucydides, Isocrates, and Lysias, to condemn the gods whom they honored. Still, though I think it to be absurd, I do not command that they should change their sentiments for the sake of their pupils. But I give them their choice; either not to teach what they do not think correct; or, if they will teach, that they first teach and satisfy their pupils, that neither Homer, nor Hesiod, nor any one of those whom they have hitherto condemned for impiety, ignorance, and error concerning the gods, is what they have represented. . . . If they think that those writers are in error as to the holy gods, then let them go rather to the churches of the Galileans, and there explain Matthew and Luke, whose disciples you are, and accordingly influence others to abstain from the sacred rites. I wish, as you would say, that your ears and your tongue may be regenerated, as to those things which I wish that I, and all that love me, may always take part in.”\* The following is in a strain still more characteristic of the dexterous and facetious prince. “The members of the Arian church,” he says, “being pampered with riches, have assailed the followers of Valentinus, and have ventured on such things at Edessa, as should not

\* Julian. Imperat. *Epist. ad Jamblich.* (Opp. Edit. Paris. pp. 303—307.)

take place in a well-regulated city. Therefore, since they are so commanded by their most admirable law, that they may the more easily arrive at the kingdom of heaven, we, to help them in this endeavour, have ordered all the money of the church of Edessa to be taken away, and given to the soldiers, and that its estates be annexed to our domain; that, being poor, they may become discreet, and may not be deprived of the kingdom of heaven, which they aim at.”\* The insult here perhaps gave as much satisfaction to the writer, as the injury. It is not unlikely that to the witty, but not avaricious, Emperor, the irony may have even recommended the confiscation.

Whether, however, the treatment which Christianity received from Julian as a magistrate was more or less harsh, he did not confine to this his endeavours for its suppression. “He employed himself,” says Libanius, “during the long nights of the winter season, [before his fatal expedition for the conquest of Persia, that is, of the winter of 362–3,] upon an argument against those books which represent the man of Palestine as God, and the son of God.”† It was written in Greek, the language which Julian, from his Asiatic education, commonly used, and,—as all the numerous references to the work, by friends and foes, agree, (for it has perish-

\* Julian. Imp. *Epistola ad Hecebolum*. (pp. 307, 308.)

† As cited by Socrates. *Hist. Eccles.* Lib. iii. cap. 23. (p. 200. Edit. Cantab.)

ed,) — was of considerable elaboration and extent, consisting of seven books, as Jerome says,\* or of three, according to Cyril,† those fathers having regard respectively, as would appear, to two different methods of dividing its contents. Cyril, who, in his confutation of it in a treatise in ten books written about seventy years later, quotes from it largely, complains of its great want of method, and the frequency of its repetitions. From the form which Cyril has adopted in his reply, it is reasonable to suppose that he has given us the substance of Julian's argument. The reply is in a dialogue, in which Cyril represents Julian as successively stating his objections, though occasionally Cyril says that he states them for him in an abridged form; and after the statement of each follow the comments which the father makes upon it.

We naturally turn to it with a peculiar kind of interest. A royal author, if any author, feels himself above criticism, and will say with freedom whatever he can persuade himself may be said with any degree of justice. A royal controvertist will not consent to be worsted for want of any materials, which pains or money can command, to sustain his reasonings. It is supposable, that there might be facts, bearing on the discussion, scarcely within the reach of any means possessed by a private scholar like Porphyry or Celsus, which yet would not escape

\* Hieron. *Epist.* 84. (Opp. Tom. I. p. 928.)

† Cyril. *contra Julian. Imp.* Lib. i. (p. 3. Edit. Aubert.)

the inquiries of one who could apply the resources of the Roman empire to collect the topics for his ingenuity to use. The danger would rather be, that, the Emperor's purpose to signalize himself as a disputant once known, there would be those who would not hesitate to have recourse to fraud, in order to contribute to the triumphs of his logic. At all events, whatever Julian, in his position, could not find to say by way of discrediting the authority of Christianity, it is fair to presume was not to be found. What he has said to that effect, with his temper, his freedom, his Christian and philosophical education, and his means of knowledge of all that could advance his purpose, it is fair to presume was all that was to be said.

But, in point of fact, it is clear that the work of Julian owed all the consideration which it enjoyed to the station of its writer. The master of so many legions could not reason feebly. There was force in the conclusions, if there was none in the process. The accounts we have of his treatise show it to have added nothing to the arguments of Celsus and Porphyry, beyond some further illustrations under the same heads, which prevented him from appearing as a mere copyist, and which his youthful initiation in Christianity prepared him to supply. He abounded, even more than they, in injurious appeals against the faith to popular prejudice, a method of assault for which his sarcastic vein gave him a peculiar aptness, and which would be the more efficient and wounding, as being dealt from such an

exalted quarter. He affected to designate the Christians by the contemptuous title of *Galileans*, and is even said by some of the ecclesiastical writers to have issued an edict that they should be so called.\* Sometimes his reproaches are serious and vehement, as where he says, “This sect of Galileans . . . esteem nothing to be good and valuable, that is taught by us Greeks, or by the Hebrews, disciples of Moses; but, collecting whatever is bad in both, they have taken atheism from the Jewish absurdity, and a wicked dissolute life from our carelessness and indifference. And this they call a most excellent religion.”† And again; “You miserable people refuse to worship the shield that the great Jupiter, or father Mars sent down, . . . and you worship the wood of the cross, and make signs of it upon your foreheads, and fix it upon your doors. Shall we for this hate the more intelligent, or pity the more simple and ignorant of your sect, who, following you, . . . leave the immortal gods, and betake themselves to a dead Jew?”‡

Sometimes, more true to his temperament, his vein is bantering and jocose. Thus, commenting on the words of Paul, “Ye are washed, ye are sanctified, in the name of Jesus Christ,” he says, “You see . . . they had been sanctified, having

\* Gregorii Nazianz. *Oratio Tertia*. § 73. (Opp. Tom. I. p. 81. Edit. Paris.)

† Cyril. *contra Julian*. Lib. ii. (p. 43.)      ‡ Ibid. Lib. vi. (p. 194.)

been scoured and cleaned with water, which penetrates even to the soul. Yes, baptism, which cannot cure . . . . the gout, nor the dysentery, . . . . takes away adulteries, extortions, and all other sins of the soul.”\* It is on the occasion of a similar taunt in a still extant work of Julian, that the impatient Bentley exclaims, “He, Julian, to laugh at expiation by baptism, whose whole life after his apostasy, was a continued course of washings, purgations, expiations, with the most absurd ceremonies ; addicted to the whole train of superstitions, omens, presages, prodigies, spectres, dreams, visions, auguries, oracles, magic, theurgic, psychomantic ; whose whole court in a manner consisted of haruspices, and sacrificuli, and philosophers as silly as they ; . . . . who, if he had returned victor out of Persia (as his very friends jested on him,) would have extinguished the whole species of bulls and cows by the number of his sacrifices !”†

Yet sometimes the hasty Emperor could so far forget himself as to contradict all this calumnious levity, and do better justice to the good men whom he had thus ventured to revile. “Why do we not attend,” he says, in a letter to the high-priest of Galatia, “to what has been the chief cause of the spread of impiety, humanity to strangers, care in burying the dead, and that holiness of life, which they so ostentatiously display ; all which things I

\* Cyril. *contra Julian.* Lib. vii. (p. 245.)

† *Phileleutherus Lipsiensis.* § 43. (p. 24.)

desire to have our people observe. It is a shame for the impious Galileans to relieve not only their own people, but ours also, and that our poor should be neglected by us, and be left helpless and destitute.” \*

It is this greater abundance of his raillery against Christians and their faith, which chiefly distinguishes the work of Julian from the earlier works with the same design. In the accounts of it, and extracts from it, which remain, is found no topic of argument whatever, new to those who are acquainted with the treatises of Celsus and Porphyry; and none, I think, is urged with greater force than by those writers, except that, as has been remarked, the amount of criticism of the contents of both the Old and the New Testament is greater. It contains a variety of remark relating to the Jewish religion rather than the Christian, though designed to wound the latter through the sides of the former.† It urges that the God of the Jews, and thus of the Christians, was, according to the authorized representations of his character, only a local and national deity;‡ though elsewhere, with singular inconsistency, it insists, that the Jewish divinity and the Christian were differently represented, the one as subsisting in one person, the other as in three.§ It repeats the question, why, if such a revelation as that of Chris-

\* In a letter to Arsacius, high-priest of Galatia, preserved by Sozomen. *Hist. Eccles.* Lib. v. cap. 16. (p. 204. Edit. Cantab.)

† Cyril. *contra Julian.* Lib. v. (pp. 152, 168, 176.) Lib. vii. (pp. 218, 224.)

‡ Ibid. Lib. iii. pp. 100, 106.

§ Ibid. Lib. ix. (p. 291.)

tianity was ever to be made, it should have been delayed so long.\* It professes to expose the impropriety of the application of various Jewish prophecies to the Messiah and his faith.† And, finally, it undertakes to point out incongruities and discrepancies of statement in single passages of the New Testament.‡

Compared with the treatment of the same topics by the other writers of the same class whom we have already particularly examined, there is no novelty in any of these forms of argument, as urged by Julian, requiring any thing to be added to the remarks to which they have already led. On the other hand, Julian, like his predecessors in the same walk,—though to less purpose, on account of his later age,—has fulfilled an office the furthest possible from his intentions, in bringing a contribution to our evidence of the universal reception by Christians, in his day, and for an indefinite time before it, of the Gospel history and its records, as we now possess them. Every reference of his, with whatever unfriendly intent, to events connected with the first publication of our religion, and to the contents of its sacred books, is a new assurance to us of that unanimity of assent to them, by Christians in his time and before, which carries us

\* Cyril. *contra Julian.* Lib. iii. (p. 106.)

† Ibid. Lib. viii. p. 253. Hieron. *in Hoseam*, xi. 1 (Tom. III. p. 78.)

‡ Hieron. *in Mat.* i. 16. (Tom. III. p. 186.) ix. 9. (p. 616.) Cyril. *contra Julian.* Lib. vi. (p. 213.)

back to the reality of those events, and the authenticity of those writings, for a reasonable explanation of its cause. Julian also expressly specifies the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Paul, and this in the peculiar manner of giving a general statement of his view of a portion of their contents,\* thus showing the acquaintance with them, which he had been at pains to acquire, as with the authentic record of the belief of Christians, and distinctly waving any dispute respecting that all-important topic of the controversy.

If some things, already said, will be repeated, others, which I have passed over, will be supplied in the words of the concise summary given by the excellent Lardner, of his observations on various parts of the works of Julian. “Julian has borne,” says that writer, “a valuable testimony to the history, and to the books, of the New Testament. He allows that Jesus was born in the reign of Augustus, at the time of the taxing made in Judea by Cyrenius; that the Christian religion had its rise, and began to be propagated, in the times of the emperors Tiberius and Claudius. He bears witness to the genuineness and authenticity of the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and the Acts of the Apostles; and he so quotes them as to intimate that they were the only historical books received by Christians as of authority, and the only authentic memoirs of Jesus Christ and his apostles, and of the

† Cyril. *contra Julian.* Lib. x. (p. 327.)

doctrine preached by them. He allows their early date, and even argues for it. He also quotes, or plainly refers to, the Acts of the Apostles, and to St. Paul's Epistles to the Romans, the Corinthians, and the Galatians. He does not deny the miracles of Jesus Christ, but speaks of him as having healed the blind, the lame, and demoniacs, as having rebuked the wind, and walked upon the waves of the sea. He endeavours indeed to diminish these works, but in vain. . . . So that, upon the whole, he has undesignedly borne witness to the truth of many things recorded in the books of the New Testament. He aimed to overthrow the Christian religion, but has confirmed it. His arguments against it are perfectly harmless, and insufficient to unsettle the weakest Christian. He justly excepts to some things introduced into the Christian profession by the late professors of it in his own time, or sooner. But he has not made one objection of moment against the Christian religion, as contained in the genuine and authentic books of the New Testament."\*

Having thus, in this and the four preceding Lectures, attempted an account of the controversy respecting the divine origin of Christianity, during the first four centuries, while it was forcing its way to the place of the religion of the civilized world, I am in my next Lecture to introduce a survey of the modern controversy on the subject, beginning soon

\* *Testimonies of Ancient Heathens.* Chap. 46. § 4. (Vol. IV. pp. 341, 342.)

after the time when the Protestant Reformation both gave a degree of license to such discussions, and turned the minds of men to a re-examination of the grounds of their faith. And the first writings on the subject, which I shall have occasion particularly to notice, will be those of the earliest and most respectable of the English Deists, Lord Herbert of Cherbury.

## LECTURE XIV.

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### RENEWAL OF THE CONTROVERSY IN MODERN TIMES.

IN preceding Lectures I have attempted an account of the course of the controversy respecting the divine origin of the religion of Jesus, down to the time of its secure establishment, in the fourth century, as the religion of the Roman empire, that is, of the civilized world. One or two remarks, by way of retrospect of the ground already passed over, may well be made before we proceed to other stages of the discussion.

In the first place, we have seen, that points which have been diligently contested by modern unbelievers, as being, what in truth they are, intimately connected with the Christian argument, are not disputed by the unbelievers of ancient times, but on the contrary are fully allowed and argued upon, as if notorious and not admitting of question. The ancient infidels have dealt largely in attempts to foreclose any disposition to inquire into the claims of the religion, by slanders exposing it and its

professors to extreme prejudice and odium. They have objected to doctrines of Christianity, and otherwise criticized the contents of its authoritative books. They have raised philosophical questions concerning it, as the questions of the fitness of its being revealed in a late age, and, in the first instance, to a single people. They have complained of applications, made by its advocates, of prophecies of Old Testament scripture to facts and doctrines of the New. They have pretended such things as that Christianity did but re-publish old truths, and therefore was unnecessary ; and that the humble and afflicted circumstances of the life and death of its author were unbecoming the dignity of the office which he claimed. These and other like methods of assault, heretofore specified, they have industriously used. But when they have been brought to the question of those miraculous works, to which Jesus appealed, as establishing his mission from the only Omnipotent, the Ruler of the Universe, they never met them with any thing like a distinct and circumstantial denial of their reality ; but, from the urgency of the argument which those miracles supplied, they were fain to take refuge, first, in an hypothesis long ago exploded, and having of course now no place in the controversy,—that of their having been wrought by demoniacal or magical arts ; and, secondly, in the assertion (attempted by the New Platonists to be sustained in the utterly ineffectual way remarked upon in my last Lecture), that similar works to those of Jesus had been per-

formed by others,—particularly by another,—to whom however the character of a divine messenger had not been ascribed.

Further, and what I would still more insist upon, those writers do not undertake to contradict, but, on the contrary, are, in numerous specifications, our express witnesses to, certain facts so important in the Christian argument, that modern unbelievers, in the mere desperation (must it not be said?) of their cause, and in mere defiance of history, have ventured to deny them; namely, the facts, first, of Christianity having been first preached by Jesus in Judea at the cost of his life, in the reign of Tiberius Cæsar; and, secondly, of the authenticity of the records of his life as being the work of eye and ear witnesses of his deeds and discourses, and companions of such eye and ear witnesses,—persons therefore competent, from their position and circumstances, to know the truth of what they undertook to relate.

These, which I have last specified, every one at all considerate of their bearings perceives to be most pregnant facts. It is easy, in some later time, to make up a story of pretended transactions of old date. But when we are sure that a narrative in our hands is the work of persons, who lived at the period, and in circumstances, to see and hear what they pretend to have seen and heard, provided it was real, then all that remains to be considered is the question of their honesty; and, if that can be made out, the evidence for the truth of what

they have related is complete. Now the principal early antagonists of our religion have scarcely been surpassed in acuteness by any of their modern successors. They knew perfectly well where to look for weak points in its proof, of which advantage could be taken to the best effect; and, if they could have found such an exposed point where they would have first looked for it, thither they would not have failed to direct their efforts. That would have been no unsatisfactory skirmish about the outposts, but a vigorous onset upon the citadel.

Why did not Celsus, like Volney, affirm that Christianity was an allegory, and Jesus a personification of the Sun? Why did not Porphyry, like Bolingbroke, question whether Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, wrote the books which go by their names? Was it because they overlooked the importance of such assertions, if they could be maintained? Who, for an instant, can entertain such an imagination? No; but because they lived near to the time, and knew better; and they knew that others knew better too, and that it would be worse than labor lost to attempt to discredit such notorious facts. And, whatever other ground unbelief may now assume, is it not the very infatuation of skepticism to undertake at this day to dispute (concerning the authenticity of the Gospel records, for instance), what the enemies of the faith, living close to the time in question, did not dispute, while they could not but have seen the decisive importance of disputing it, provided they could have done so with

any prospect of success,—that is, provided they had not been fully assured of its truth?

And, to generalize this view a little,—though to carry it out, as one is tempted to do, would lead to quite too wide a range of remark, and my hearers will easily make new applications of the hint for themselves,—why is it that we no where find the ancient unbelievers fixing upon some one anti-Christian theory as the cause of that marvellous effect, the rise and spread of Christianity, and urging that consistently and vigorously as the true explanation of the phenomenon? This, with a fair share of facts on their side,—facts attainable, if ever attainable, at the time when they lived,—would have been a far more effective way of conducting the argument than any one they have actually used.

I have asked, why they did not dispute the genuineness of the record, as being from the sources alleged, if that could with any pretence be done. To do this would have been to fasten a firm hold on the main question. Could the denial have been sustained, the main question would have been laid to rest. Could the denial have been plausibly urged, the main question would have been seriously embarrassed. But I ask again, If it was necessary to admit the authenticity of the books, why was not the historical truth of their contents,—of their narratives concerning Jesus,—distinctly and circumstantially assailed? Something undoubtedly was true relating to the matter. If the books were

really written by companions of Jesus, then one of two consequences followed. Either their contents were true, and then, as Christians maintained, Jesus had been accredited as a divine messenger ; or else their contents were not true, and this must have been either because the writers were impostors, intending a fraud, or mistaken, and themselves the subjects of one. Certainly proof, either establishing, or creating a reasonable presumption of, either the one or the other of these facts,—had either been a fact,—must have been within the reach of those who lived at the time, and soon after ; and a sufficient exigency existed to cause it to be produced.

It was, however, not produced. Whatever else we may find in the unbelieving writers near the time, we look in vain for any thing like a consistent theory of dissent ; any thing like an explanation, upon natural grounds, of facts, which, unless they could be explained on such grounds, were of a description to enforce the reception of Christianity as a supernatural communication. What we do find, on the part of opponents, is just what we might expect in the absence of all just ground of suspicion. One vaguely suspects one thing ; another, another. Here is a criticism of the doctrine ; there a reproach on its professors. Christianity had had some origin ; it had had some history. If the pretended one was false, the true one could be told. Is such a counter story told, or attempted to be told, in those ancient works, to which it would belong ? If so, where ? If not,

why not? The Christian has his answer to this question. The Christian history was not to be gainsaid. Is there any other account to be given of its not having been circumstantially gainsaid near the time? If there is, let unbelief present it.

I cannot pass from this part of the subject without another observation. One finds, in the books of Christian evidences, much and not too great stress laid on the rapid propagation of Christianity, and the great numbers, who, in near and distant countries, attested the power, with which, by the lips of its first preachers, it addressed its evidences to their senses and understandings, and its appeals to their hearts. But I know not whether I am so much impressed with the fact, however imposing, of its having so soon converted the masses of the Roman world, as with that of its having so soon converted and pervaded the intellect and cultivation of the Roman world; an impression, I may add, which I have received with entirely new force, while engaged in a course of reading with reference to the present discussion. Nothing can be finer, for all qualities in which they can pretend to merit, than the works of Pagan writers,—philosophers, orators, poets,—in the age preceding Jesus, and in his own. They leave nothing to be desired, except the pervading spirit of a credible and effective religion, and of a pure and high morality. But the objects which they regard and exalt are worldly; even the intellectual appetites which they feed belong to a secondary class; and on the highest sub-

jects of contemplation there rests an oppressive doubt and darkness. A century or two passes, and we take up an entirely new set of books, the like of which the world had never before seen. The pomp and polish of the Greek and Roman rhetoric are now found employed on no longer hesitating or distracted discussion of the highest themes of human thought ; but uttering the most lofty sentiments of faith, devotion, fortitude, expansive and comprehensive love. Men, it is clear,—at least, some men,—have reached a loftier eminence of sentiment, speculation, and will. They have different thoughts of themselves and of their doom. All the superficial graces of their fathers' days are still around them, but there is a new inspiration to their understandings, and a holier impulse in their hearts. Human nature is something graver, nobler, manlier, more august. It has worthier cares than before ; a more steadfast and indomitable purpose ; a greater extent of view ; more stimulating objects of ambition.

And what had so speedily produced so remarkable a change in the civilization of a period, in some respects, the most civilized of all time ? This had produced it. Between the two epochs to which I have referred, there had been born, in an obscure condition, a native of one of the most obscure provinces subjected to the Roman sway. Far away from the forums and the schools of Rome, where the predecessors of those who were presently to count it their highest pride to spread the

triumphs of his name, were thinking of nothing so little, as of what he or any other Galilean might be doing, he had for a short time preached his doctrine, and done his works, and instructed a few poor men to whom he designed to bequeath his charge, and then resigned himself to a felon's death. Never, humanly speaking, was a cause more hopeless ; yet never was known so magnificent a triumph. The twelve fishermen went about their work, and they did it after such a sort, as to make the contemptuous at first, and then reluctant and persecuting, world attend and listen. They made their meek, but resolute and earnest, words go forth unto all the earth, their sound unto the end of the world. Strangest of all to say, they won over its genius, wisdom, accomplishments, and taste, while they emptied its temples, and alarmed its thrones ; so that, in less than one hundred years after the death of Zebedee the boatman's younger son, the ardent Tertullian, trained in all the learning of his time, and eminent, indeed, among his Christian associates, but not unrivalled, was contributing the stores of his rich erudition to illustrate the superior worth of the wisdom which makes wise to salvation ; and Minucius Felix, the distinguished advocate at the imperial tribunals, was pleading its claims in the forcible and polished periods of an eloquence so Ciceronian, as Cicero's self would have scarcely desired to disown. Of such profound interest is this view, as to make it no less than an era in the life of the Christian scholar, when he first becomes

acquainted with the best specimens of this class of authors.

Christianity, through the severe examination and conflict of three hundred years, has risen, from its feeble origin, to be the controlling element of human society. We dismiss here the consideration of its early struggles with unbelief, for they are now at an end. Infidelity has urged whatever it had to urge, and now the hardly contested victory is won. No other of those movements, of which we have undertaken a survey, took place for more than a thousand years. Christianity, like other blessings, once bestowed by Providence, was committed for custody and use to human discretion and faithfulness, which, in this instance, as in so many others, proved not sufficiently true to their trust. The union of spiritual with temporal power, adverse in so many respects to the interests of our religion, suppressed any demonstrations of unbelief, if such demonstrations would otherwise have been made. But this circumstance cannot be supposed to deprive modern inquirers of any means of arriving at the truth upon the subject, inasmuch as, in respect to adverse facts, four centuries had afforded ample opportunity to produce all which could be found of that description, and what these could not find could scarcely be open to the discovery of any later period; and, in respect to mere philosophical objections, the speculations of modern times may be supposed competent to present all likely to be brought out in any discussions, however free they might

have been, of the Middle Ages. The circumstances of the case do not permit us to look for formal demonstrations of unbelief, in modern times, to any period anterior to that of the Protestant Reformation ; and, in fact, we find no set argument of this description till nearly a hundred years since the date of that movement, when Edward, Baron Herbert of Cherbury and of Castle Kerry in Ireland, published in 1624, the last year of James the First, his treatise “*De Veritate, or On Truth*.”

Before that time, skepticism had either taken counsel of its fears, and been silent, or, if it had appeared, in any way to force itself upon attention, had been immediately quieted by violence. Says Hallam, in his “*Introduction*,” “The extreme superstition of the popular creed, the conversation of Jews and Mahometans, the unbounded admiration of Pagan genius and virtue, the natural tendency of many minds to doubt, and to perceive difficulties, which the schoolmen were apt to find everywhere, and nowhere to solve, joined to the irreligious spirit of the Aristotelian philosophy, especially as modified by Averroes, could not but engender a secret tendency towards infidelity, the course of which may be traced with ease in the writings of those ages. Thus the tale of ‘*The Three Rings*’ in Boccacio, whether original or not, may be reckoned among the sports of a skeptical philosophy.”\* And he goes on to give a list, from another author, of the writers of

\* Hallam’s *Introduction to the Literature of Europe in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Vol. 1. pp. 189, 190.

some defences of Christianity in the same century, which, obscure as they are and apparently were, would not have been produced, had not some existing state of opinion been thought to call for them.

Early in the following century, the school of Padua incurred the suspicion of infidelity; and a work on the immortality of the soul by Pomponatius, its most distinguished professor, who however constantly denied any design to impeach the authority of revelation, was publicly burned at Venice.\* The same, according to Bayle, in his Dictionary, was, in the year 1574, the fate not of the book but of the author, in the case of one Vallée, who had proclaimed his unbelief in a small pamphlet; about which time also, says the same writer in his article upon Father Viret, the successor of Calvin at Geneva, that reformer spoke of being acquainted with some persons, who called themselves by the peculiar name of *Deists*, professing to believe in a God, but denying that he had made a revelation through Jesus Christ. Of Montaigne I am hereafter briefly to speak, and of the sense and restrictions under which he is properly named in this connexion. His imitator and copyist, Charron, had also a certain equivocal standing in the infidel ranks.† Vanini, an Italian, in a treatise published at Paris, in 1616, avowed his disbelief in all religion, a boldness which he expiated at the stake.‡

The first formal expositions of infidel argument

\* Hallam's *Introduction*, &c. Vol. I. p. 435. † Ibid. Vol. III. p. 338.

‡ Ibid. p. 120

in modern times were, as has been remarked, those of Lord Herbert of Cherbury. But, before proceeding to speak of the contents of his works, we shall do well to pause again, to attend to two general considerations having reference to the whole modern controversy. In the first place, I observe, that the Christian argument cannot, with any reasonable mind, be allowed to labor under any prejudice, arising from the fact, that, after having been so long laid at rest, it has been revived, since the Protestant Reformation, and at intervals ever since has been brought before the public notice. What else could have been expected? How could it have been otherwise, on the supposition that all the claims of our religion were perfectly well-founded? At the period of the Reformation, the mind of Christendom, awaking from the torpor of a long unquestioning submission to authority, had to ask itself, what was the evidence of all that it had received as truth. Its doubts, as far as doubts came to be entertained, respecting the divine origin of the religion of Jesus, were not tokens of a deficiency in the evidence of that fact, but only tokens of its ignorance of the evidence which existed. For ages it had indolently acquiesced in some opinions, which now, under other influences, it had come to abandon or to distrust. How natural, how reasonable, how right, that it should proceed to re-examine the foundations of all the opinions which it had most reverently cherished.

The reformer, while he rejected Romanism,

reasonably asked (if he was a reasonable man), whether he ought not, at the same time, to reject Christianity, with which Romanism had been hitherto identified. The Romanist, while he reviewed the grounds of his own disputed faith, was invited to review those of that religion of Jesus, which his own profession was asserted to represent. The decisions of antiquity, if they were considered, or if they were asserted, to be of uncertain authority in part, were again to be gone into, as a whole. The claims of a religion which assumed to control all the affairs, to mould the whole character, to present the highest objects to the hopes and the fears, of man, were not such as could summarily be disposed of. That they had been admitted, was no good reason, under the altered circumstances, why they should be admitted still. The question which they presented had always been weighty; the new style of thinking which had come to prevail had given it a new extent and complication. It was necessary now, in order to an intelligent and sincere conviction, that the traditional opinion should be surveyed anew in the lights of a reformed philosophy. Was it recommended or sustained by, or could it be reconciled with, the principles of judgment approved by the re-awakened spirit of the age?

These were questions, by no means, it is true, answered in the negative as soon as they were asked, but yet questions entitled to, and demanding, a reasonable reply. Considering how new, at

the period of which we speak, to the mass of thinking men, was the question upon what solid grounds of evidence the divine origin of our religion could be shown to rest, and in what new relations, from the introduction of a different style of thinking, all questions required to be viewed, it is no matter of regret, certainly no matter of wonder, that a disposition was manifested to look at it on all sides, and see whether it would bear a suspicious scrutiny. More than three hundred years passed, from the era of its first promulgation, before it satisfied and silenced its opponents. It is only two thirds of that period, since its claims have been a second time brought into question, under circumstances requiring the whole subject to be reviewed, with careful regard to its new and wide relations. Its claims ought not, under these circumstances, to be in the slightest degree prejudiced in our minds, by the knowledge that questions have been asked, and continue to be asked, concerning it. Those questions ought to be asked, and to be answered.

When they are asked, an occasion arises for their being answered. Many of them have been asked, and by the answer which has been given to them have been set at rest. As fast as others are in like manner disposed of, the controversy will be narrowed, till at length, as the process goes on, it may come to be dismissed. We are still in the midst of that process, which no one can reasonably wonder has occupied so much time. Much, that has been objected, has been so discussed that it is

no longer repeated ; or, at any rate, not so repeated as to excite attention or unsettle belief. If more remains to be done in the same way, still continually the range of infidel argument is reduced. And at all events, the fact, that, within the short time that this argument has had the opportunity of a hearing, it has not been entirely silenced, is nothing to warrant any confidence in its soundness, or in the extent of its resources. Whoever thinks, that, in the progress of the modern controversy, unbelief has as yet established any thing, may naturally predict for it future triumphs. Whoever conceives, that, as often as it has specifically put forth its objections, it has been worsted, will be of opinion that it is destined to an ultimate total discomfiture. And whoever does not perceive that it has made progress, since discussion became, as it is at present, entirely free, will not be disposed to regard the mere fact of its not having yet relinquished the contest, as any presumption against the security of what it assails.

The other remark which I have thought not out of place at this period of the discussion, when we are approaching a notice of some writers of great literary celebrity, is, that we cannot reasonably entertain any distrust whatever of the sufficiency of the evidences of Christianity, merely because of their having been rejected as insufficient by a number of eminent men. Genius so commands our admiration, that we are very apt to trust it for what it has no particular capacity to do ; and it is

a wrong, which we commonly practise on our own understandings, to allow their conclusions to be brought into a degree of doubt by the knowledge of their not being acquiesced in by one or another individual, of extraordinary merit in his own walk, or of superior general intelligence. It is a question that ought to be looked at, how far a man of good sense can allow himself to regard the proofs of our religion under any unfavorable bias, by reason of its having been rejected, for instance, by famous men like Voltaire or La Place, like Bolingbroke or Hume.

It might be said, that, if the number and weight of high intellectual authorities is to determine the question, the great preponderance of such authorities is on the side of Christianity. But this, however undeniable in point of fact, I do not care to urge, preferring to invite attention to the inquiry, what degree of justness there is in the so general impression, that, because a man has extraordinary intellectual attributes, therefore his conclusions,—as *his*,—are entitled to peculiar consideration on the part of other minds. His arguments, like those of other persons, are entitled to consideration; and, because of his uncommon gifts, it is likely that his arguments may be so conceived and stated as to demand for themselves peculiar consideration. But that is not our question. Influence through an argument, come from what quarter it may, is of course a reasonable thing. Our present inquiry is, concerning the reasonable-

ness of influence through the reputation of the arguer. And as to this, the correctness of the following statements will not, I suppose, on reflection, be thought liable to dispute.

In the first place, the mere naked fact that an individual is great and famous does not entitle his decision upon this subject to any peculiar authority whatever. The quality which comes into exercise in deciding this question is not imagination, not wit, nor any thing else but simply a clear and sound judgment. The reputation, which, if any could, may give some pledge of a correct decision, is simply the reputation of a clear and sound judgment ; and this certainly is not an invariable adjunct of qualities that have conferred the highest fame, even if it be not in a degree inconsistent with them. Many, at least, of the most famous men, have won their renown through some idiosyncrasy of mind ; and the genius which most dazzles has something of a dreamy, fantastic, extravagant, character ; it involves a certain tendency to exaggeration, such as forbids it to be an object of perfect trust.

What I am here saying is no more than what is recognised as true in the common intercourse of life. For the very reason that a man is a genius, and commands our admiration, he may be the man to whom we will not give our confidence, nor intrust our business ; our confidence, which can only be reposed in that quality which calmly seeks and sagaciously discerns the good and the true ; our

business, which we cannot consent to hazard on the chances of some splendid caprice. Is there a man here, who, in a question that concerned his life or property, would desire to commit his case to a jury of geniuses? Instead of their possible oddities, extravagances, refinements, ingenuities, and paradoxes, should we not all prefer to await the judgment of a panel of discreet, unimaginative, straight-forward men? And if it be our opinion, thus evinced in transactions touching our common interests, that clear, sound sense, a quality that does not often win the highest fame, is the quality that does give the highest authority to a decision on a disputed question, there would seem to be no defensible reason why we should be in the least disturbed, as to our persuasion of the truth of Christianity, because of our knowledge of its having been rejected by this or that individual, distinguished in the walks of philosophy or poetry, of eloquence or art. He may, it is true, be distinguished not only by his brilliant qualities, but also by the discerning good sense, which so far would entitle his determinations to respect. But that is by no means proved by the mere circumstance, which has attracted us, of his being highly-endowed and famous; and yet that simply is what we want to know, before we can regard the opinion with any peculiar respect or forbearance, on account of its being his.

And when we know that the opinion in question is that of a sagacious man, we want still to know

more. No man's judgment, as such, is to be confided in, or deferred to, except so far as it is known to have been carefully exercised on the case in hand. Excellent as it may be, it is an excellent *capacity*, — no more, — till it has inquisitively searched out and deliberately looked at the facts that bear on a correct decision. The truest judgment, if it be (as doubtless it may be) so false to itself as to act in ignorance or haste, may err; and accordingly it is perhaps men of the best judgment, that are oftenest known, on further inquiry, to change their minds. They erroneously supposed themselves to be already in sufficient possession of the facts; or their minds had, from circumstances, been occupied with some strong prepossession, which they had not given the proper attention to analyze and define; and further investigation has led or may lead them to an opposite result.

When a man then, even of that character, has declared himself against our religion, in order for the fact to be of material interest to us, we want to know at what stage of inquiry respecting it he stands. If he has given much of the attention of his acknowledged good judgment to other things, to law, to medicine, to mechanism, to statesmanship, it is not likely that he will change his opinions respecting them; and those opinions are entitled, as his, to our regard. If he has not given much of the candid and careful attention of his acknowledged good judgment to the facts of Christianity, then, before we trust him, we will wait till he has.

When he has, it is likely that he may change his opinions. At any rate, his decisions, made up on such a basis, are meanwhile of no great worth.

And, once more, should the strongest case possible occur, should some individual of unquestionable general good sense and impartiality be known to have given studious attention to those facts, should we be unable to point out any important element disregarded by him, or any unfortunate bias in the given case to warp his characteristic rectitude of mind, and yet should he end in rejecting our faith,—should such a complication of improbabilities occur (as I know not that it ever did), still I submit that all it could reasonably do would be to occasion us great surprise; it could not reasonably shake our own conviction. We should only have to say, that there must have been some sinister influence that we cannot detect,—which certainly might well be,—or that, in short, it was a case which we could not pretend to explain. But to allow the principle, that any diffidence is to be felt respecting the correctness of a conclusion of our own, because, in some high quarter, it is not received, would be to introduce a universal Pyrrhonism into all matters of speculation and of conduct; and it would be alike a course which no considerate man can justify, and no practical man adopts.

Thus much I have thought it fit to say respecting the rightful weight of the mere authority of famous names, preparatory to a mention of some of

the distinguished modern names of unbelief. The works of Lord Herbert present the most favorable specimen anywhere to be found of compositions of that class. He brought to the subject, what so many have not brought, a serious and devout mind. He belonged to the stern, manly, earnest age of England; to the age, in which Bacon was a little earlier, and Milton a little later; to the time, when the race of triflers and mockers in his great country had not come. He wrote three books in Latin, relating to this controversy; the first, entitled “On Truth,” which (an extraordinary fact, it may be thought) bears the license to print of the Bishop of London’s chaplain, and which did not obstruct the employment of its author in high political trusts, and his elevation to the peerage under Charles the First; the second, entitled “The Causes of Error,” to which was appended a treatise “On the Religion of a Layman” (this I have never seen, and suppose there is no copy in this country); the third, which was posthumous, entitled “The Religion of the Gentiles.”

Lord Herbert was not, as Hume and others have been, a disbeliever in the possibility of miraculous divine manifestation. On the contrary, he believed himself to have been the subject of a miracle, designed to encourage him to print his first work. He left in manuscript an autobiography, in which he says, that, after writing the treatise “On Truth,” containing views so sure to provoke opposition and hostility, he was much exercised with

doubts whether he ought to publish it. “Being thus doubtful in my chamber,” he writes, “one fair day in the summer, my casement being open towards the south, the sun shining clear, and no wind stirring, I took my book ‘*De Veritate*’ in my hands, and, kneeling on my knees, devoutly said these words; ‘O thou eternal God, author of this light which now shines upon me, and giver of all inward illuminations, I do beseech thee, of thine infinite goodness, to pardon a greater request than a sinner ought to make. I am not satisfied enough, whether I shall publish this book. If it be for thy glory, I beseech thee give me some sign from heaven. If not, I shall suppress it.’ I had no sooner spoken these words, but a loud, though yet gentle noise, came forth from the heavens,—for it was like nothing on earth,—which did so cheer and comfort me, that I took my petition as granted, and that I had the sign I demanded; whereupon also I resolved to print my book. This, how strange soever it may seem, I protest before the eternal God, is true; neither am I any way superstitiously deceived herein; since I did not only clearly hear the noise, but in the serenest sky that ever I saw, being without all cloud, did, to my thinking, see the place from whence it came.”\*

There can be no reasonable doubt that he believed the reality of what he thus recorded; though, had there been occasion to make the

\* Leland’s *View of the Principal Deistical Writers, &c.* Vol. I. p. 24.

statement public in his life-time, which it does not appear that he did, and had any danger been incurred by so doing, it may be questioned whether he would have felt justified in persisting in such a confident declaration of the certainty and distinctness of his memory. It was a simple case of that not very uncommon phenomenon, a false perception in a moment of high mental excitement; a perception, which there was nothing to enable him to correct, inasmuch as there was no other witness, no opportunity for one sense to review the testimony of another, and no sensible effect left behind by the momentary appearance, by which to try its reality. And the prayer preceding for such an object, the vague description of the noise, "loud and yet gentle, and like nothing on earth," and the faint addition, that he did, "to his thinking," see the place from whence it came, in a sky of unbroken blue, all betoken a state of physical sensibility and mental exaltation predisposed for the self-delusion which was experienced. It serves to illustrate the character of the man, pure, honest, and generous, but a metaphysical enthusiast and mystic, pampered, by the consciousness of lofty and somewhat original speculations, and by the habits of solitary musing to which they had led (for they were not matter for free conference with others), into the vanity of fancying himself the special favorite of that Heaven whose counsels he had succeeded to disclose.

Lord Herbert's work "*On Truth*," so obscure in two respects that it is extremely difficult to under-

stand its Latin, and still more so to grasp its metaphysics, does not distinctly introduce the subject of revealed religion till near its close. The body of the book consists of an inquiry, into which it would lead us aside from our purpose to follow him with any minute survey, into the proper means of discerning and discovering truth. He starts from a series of seven axioms ; 1. There is such a thing as truth ; 2. It is coeternal, or coeval, with the things to which it relates ; 3. It is universally diffused ; 4. It is self-evident (an assertion this, which sounds more like a paradox than like an axiom) ; 5. There are as many truths as there are differences in things ; 6. The differences in things are made known to us by our inborn powers ; 7. There is a truth predicate of these truths (a proposition which so far from being self-evident as to its meaning, as a maxim should be, is not evident as to a meaning in any way).\*

Taking his departure from these points, the author goes on to distinguish truth into the truth of the thing or object, the truth of the appearance, the truth of the perception, and the truth of the understanding.† In inquiries after truth, he says, three things are to be regarded ; the object itself, the sense or faculty by which investigation respecting it is made, and the conditions of its relation to other things.‡ He then goes on to treat of the conditions of its existence ; as, that the object of which it is affirmed should have a relation to our-

\* *De Veritate*, etc. pp. 8 — 11.

† Ibid. p. 12.

‡ Ibid. p. 13.

selves; that it should be perceived under proper advantages of time, medium, distance, and situation; that the senses should be sound, and that they should be directed to it.\* He distributes human capacities into four divisions, natural instinct, internal perception, external sensation, and reason, through the channel of one or another of which every thing knowable must become known.†

Under the head of instinctive truths he arranges the truths of religion, maintaining that all we know or can know on that subject consists of certain universally received notions, implanted in our minds by nature; and holding, as others have done, that the distinction of man from other animals consists not in reason, but in his essential capacity for religion.‡ What these universally received notions are, which make all direct revelation of them superfluous, and to which no direct revelation of other truths can be added, except for the individual himself to whom it is made, he goes on towards the end of the book to specify, as being these five; 1. That there is a supreme divinity; 2. That he ought to be worshipped; 3. That a proper application of the faculties is the principal part of divine worship; 4. That sins ought to be expiated by repentance; 5. That there is a retribution of reward and punishment after this life.§ His posthumous work “On the Religion of the Gentiles” was designed to show, that, overlaid and weakened by whatever errors,

\* *De Veritate.* pp. 13 — 26.

† *Ibid.* p. 37.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 37 — 65.

§ *Ibid.* pp. 208 — 223.

these truths were always held by the heathen nations in a competent degree of purity; a hopeless theme, on which however he expended great store of erudition. Of his remaining treatise on the subject, “The Religion of a Layman,” I am unable, for the reason before mentioned, to speak. From the accounts of it, however, it appears to have been short, and to have added no material feature to the theory.

If the account now given of the route by which, in his work on Truth, Lord Herbert would bring the reader to his own anti-Christian opinions, seems obscure, that is precisely one of the conclusions to which I would conduct my hearers. It is impossible to feel tempted to any degree of confidence in the correctness of the views of this writer, so far as depends upon the method of their defence, when one is invited to approach them through such a long, dark labyrinth of metaphysics; of metaphysics, too, treated in a language badly written by the author, and of very imperfect resources, at the best, for such a discussion. But what, in his treatise, is really material, in respect to the Christian controversy, stands so apart from its metaphysical introduction, as to admit perfectly well of a separate consideration, which certainly the theory of an alleged sufficiency of the Religion of Nature well deserves. About a century after Lord Herbert’s time, the same argument of the clearness and adequateness of a universal Natural Religion, and of the consequent needlessness of

any such revelation as that of Christianity, was treated in a popular form, and with the addition of other related topics, by Tindal, in his work entitled “Christianity as Old as the Creation;” and, as remarks on the latter writer would but lead to repetitions of what had been said on the former, if they were treated apart, I shall in this instance deviate from the order of time, and reserve what I have further to submit concerning Lord Herbert, in order to treat his works and that of Tindal together, as far as their course of argument is the same, in my next Lecture.

## LECTURE XV.

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### DEISTICAL *A PRIORI* OBJECTIONS.

THE writings of Edward Lord Herbert, whose treatise “On Truth” first appeared in 1624, and of Dr. Matthew Tindal, who published his work entitled “Christianity as Old as the Creation” in 1730, contain that to which I venture to give the name of “the deistical *à priori* argument”. It is an *argument*, fairly entitled to that appellation, and not one of those mere collections of cavils and innuendoes, which, with a large class of readers, avail more in such a case than any course of reasoning. It is a *deistical* argument, as distinguished from general skepticism and from atheism. Both these writers firmly believed in the existence of a God, and in his absolute perfections; they planted themselves upon the ground of natural religion. And it is characteristically an *à priori* argument. These writers did not, like others, content themselves with the endeavour to show,

that, in point of fact, a revelation had not been made by God through Jesus, or that there was not sufficient evidence of its having been made. The topics belonging to this part of the discussion, they, particularly Tindal, have incidentally touched. But such was not the substance or main design of their works.

The basis of argument with both was, the perfections of the Deity and the circumstances of his world ; and from these they undertook to show the unreasonableness of the supposition, that such a revelation as that of Christianity had been or would be made. This the one did in bad Latin, and with great show of metaphysical demonstration ; the other in clear and vigorous English, and in a far more popular form of address. The spirit of Lord Herbert was much more calm and devout, the manner of Tindal more familiar and attractive. The latter has given prominence to one or two topics of argument additional to the topics urged by his predecessor in those two, out of his three works, which I have seen ; but the course of reasoning of both belongs to an hypothesis so distinctively the same, as to make it altogether convenient to treat them together. As to method, that of Tindal was extremely irregular and discursive, his treatise being cast in the free shape of the dialogue ; that of Lord Herbert, as I have before had occasion to describe, consisted, after the fashion of his day, of a parade of maxims, not all of them certain as to their truth or even their meaning, and of inferences deduced

from them by such circuitous and questionable processes, that to follow them is rather an exercise in logic than a way to obtain satisfaction respecting the question argued. But the following heads, though not formally stated, will be found by the attentive reader to cover the variety of considerations presented in these books, and indeed to exhaust the hypothesis presented in them, all other matter being merely adventitious to what is embraced in these four propositions ; namely,

1. A special divine communication of religious truth did not need to be made ;
2. It could not be made ;
3. It ought not to be made ;
4. Had it been made, it would not have been such as we have in Christianity.

These four propositions, I say, will be found to cover, with the exception of some incidental suggestions, the various considerations presented in the works of Herbert and Tindal. They compose that to which I have applied the name of the *deistical à priori argument*. As I have stated them, it will have been observed that the basis of the theory is, the perfections of God and the circumstances of his world. These being such and such, it is said, it is unreasonable to suppose such a revelation to have been made, as that alleged to have been made in Christianity. In proceeding to examine this doctrine, I have to bespeak the patient attention of my hearers to a dry discussion, as a discussion of such abstract principles must, I fear, unavoidably be.

But it could not, with any justice to the main subject, be passed over.

I remark, at the outset, that, of these four propositions into which I have resolved the theory, two, — the first and last, — are such, that the unbelieving inquirer, provided he found that certain facts implied in them, or bearing upon them, could be established, might be justified in maintaining them with a degree of confidence. With respect to the two others, this is by no means equally true. A consistent believer in the perfections of God, as made known by natural religion, could not avoid feeling great diffidence, except in some extreme case, in deciding that God could not, or ought not, adopt a given course of proceeding; inasmuch as he could not safely assure himself of being in possession of all the elements of the question.

Of the propositions which I have represented as virtually constituting the theory of the works now under consideration, the first is, that a special divine communication of religious truth *did not need* to be made. This I shall not now treat at large, having already done so in the third Lecture of my previous Course, in a manner which would cause any thing I could now say on the subject to be mostly repetition. Whether or not there was a need, and an urgent need, of special divine interposition, at the time when Christianity announced itself, I freely grant to be one of the principal questions on which the decision of the ultimate question respecting the pretensions of Christianity must rest. If there was

no such need, I am prepared to admit that it was not consistent with the perfections of God that he should interpose by miracles. If we, on due inquiry, can see no such need, then I am prepared to admit that the presumption is against its existence, and that the pretence of miracles becomes to us incredible. If we can see such a need, and in proportion as we see it to have existed and to have been urgent, it becomes credible and probable to our minds that God will take the appropriate method to provide for it. Give me his parental character, which natural religion does give, and, as a consistent believer in natural religion, I must believe that he will do, at the fit time, whatever the good of his children may require.

These are principles which I see not how the considerate professor of natural religion can gainsay. If the principles are so, then, how was the fact? Was it or was it not true, at the time when Jesus published his religion, that there was needed such a new element in human society? This is a question which the Deist rightly asks, and concerning which the Christian ought to be resolved.

If the need existed, of what nature was it? Of course, it was a want of religious knowledge; of religious motives; of an impulse to religious improvement. Was there such a want? It is purely a question of fact, and history has a great many voices with which to answer it. At the time of the promulgation of Christianity, I will not ask,—though no less than this, in so many words, is

asserted in these works,—whether men already had, through the notices of nature, a revelation “absolutely perfect.”\* I will ask very much less than this. Were men, if I may so speak, on the whole, in a good religious way? Did they in some good degree understand God? Did they love and serve him? With however imperfect obedience, yet were they in possession of such truth, as to afford a prospect, that, at some future time, with nothing done except by themselves for their recovery, they would come to love and serve him? They who propose, like the writers now under our notice, to answer these questions in the affirmative, speak to the purpose, and have a right to a hearing. But, after all, what is the truth? Can they prove what they affirm?

Not to pause to insist on what would open too vast a subject, that the five points, specified by Lord Herbert as composing his system of an alleged universally received natural religion, would, if they were universally received, make a miserably imperfect and unsatisfactory religion compared

\* *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, Chap. 1. (p. 3.) “If human reason cannot enable men to discern that God has given them a rule to govern their actions by, and what that rule is, they must be, if not as ignorant as brutes, in an everlasting state of skepticism and uncertainty, in all matters relating to religion; and would indeed be in a worse condition than those inferior animals, who have instinct always to direct them to the end for which they were severally made.” *Introduction to the Second Part of “Christianity as Old as the Creation,”* p. iii. “Reason, whenever men consult it, will soon enable them to discover the being and perfections of God; what those duties are, which they owe to him and one another; and all those truths, which as rational creatures, they are capable of knowing.” *Ibid.* p. xii.

with that of Jesus, is any thing in history more notorious than the contrary of their universal reception, or even (which is an immensely different and smaller thing) their distinct, intelligent, and satisfied reception by any single mind,—the most cultivated and philosophical,—of whose convictions we have any record? Is it, or is it not, true,—as I endeavoured to show in full on the previous occasion to which I have referred, and as has been largely shown by various others,—that, except among the Jews, there was scarcely a remnant in the world of so much as a true theology; that nowhere did there exist an effective persuasion of a retribution beyond the grave; that such religion as there was, was mostly a sentiment wholly apart from morality, or else (which to a shocking extent is apparent) was hostile to it; and that, under these circumstances, human opinion and character not only disclosed a deplorable perversion for the present, but revealed no promise of future reform, no element of eventual recovery?

Are these statements, or is something like them, true? If not, then the alleged need for the intervention of Christianity did not exist, and a preliminary question in the evidences of that religion is disposed of against it. But if they are true, nothing could be imagined to constitute a more imperative claim upon the compassion of a Father who could pity the self-inflicted ruin of his children. If all men, from the creation till Christ's time, were substantially in possession of all that Christianity came

to bring, then Christianity was “as old as the creation,” in the sense of the writer who gave that title to his book. But the sages of antiquity did not think that all men, or even that any men, were so enlightened, when they lamented their own ignorance, and faintly hoped for more light. Socrates did not think so, when he told Alcibiades that he needed the aid of some better instruction to inform him how to conduct himself both toward gods and men; and that it was necessary that some god should scatter the darkness that covered his soul, that he might become able to discern good and evil.\* Plato did not think so, when he said how much more easily and safely than upon the mere *raft*, as he calls it, of the best and firmest human reason, one might sail through life upon some stronger vehicle, or divine word.† Even that Porphyry, whose hostility to our religion has been a subject of our recent notice, did not find any cause to boast of possessing what superseded the need of supernatural religious instruction, when he said, “The importance of this collection, [that is, a collection of aids to a better religious knowledge,] those can most justly estimate, who, feeling an anxious desire after the truth, have wished that some open vision of the gods might be granted to them, and set them free from their doubts.”‡ And this seems to have been even a favorite contempla-

\* Plato, *Alcibiades Secundus*, (ad calc.)

† *Phædo*, § 78. Opp. Tom. I. p. 194. (Edit. Bipont.)

‡ As quoted by Eusebius, *Præpar. Evang.* Lib. iv. cap. 7.

tion of this celebrated Platonist's school. Says Jamblichus, his most eminent disciple, in the same strain, “It is manifest that those things are to be done which are pleasing to God ; but what they are, it is not easy to know, except a man should hear them from God himself, or from some person that had heard them from God, or obtained the knowledge of them by some divine means.” \*

But, in the second place, it is part of the theory on which we are commenting, that a special divine communication of religious truth to man *could not* be made.

Lord Herbert is conducted to this conclusion through his peculiar metaphysical doctrine respecting the sources and grounds of knowledge and belief. “We arrive,” he says, “at the knowledge of all truth knowable by us, through one or the other of four channels ; namely, natural instinct, internal perception, the external senses, and reason ;” † and, having satisfied himself of this, he understands himself to have excluded revelation as a means of knowledge. But what is revelation ? It is testimony of a peculiar sort, being that of a person who professes to have received his instruction directly from God. And what is testimony ? It is a kind of evidence, compounded of two of those kinds, which this writer expressly recognises, while he rejects revelation. It is compounded of the

\* Jamblich. *de Vitâ Pythagoræ*, cap. 28. (p. 116. Edit. Amstel.)

† *De Veritate*, (p. 37.)

evidence of the external senses, and of that of reason. By the external senses we know what it is that some person declares, and what basis he offers for the conclusion, to which he invites us, that what he is saying is the truth. Thus we are put by the external senses in possession of two sets of facts on which to reason. And then the office of reason begins. Here are certain phenomena ; the question is how we shall account for them ; and, if they cannot be accounted for, in any other way, so satisfactorily as by the hypothesis of the thing asserted being true,—if, seen and heard, they prove to be such, as to lead in a fair process of ratiocination to that conclusion,—then to us the thing asserted is true ; and it is a perception of the senses, followed by an action of the reasoning faculty, which has brought us to that determination.

This I take to be the philosophy of testimony ; so that, even on the showing of the writer whom we are discussing, it is not excluded as a legitimate ground of knowledge and belief. My neighbour tells me that some indifferent fact took place within his knowledge an hour ago. I believe him, and the universal sense of mankind declares that there is nothing absurd in my doing so. But why do I believe him ? All that I know in the first instance is, that he has spoken certain words. The knowledge of that fact comes to me by means of what Lord Herbert calls by the common name of *external sensation*. All the rest is a subject for reasoning. I have then a phenomenon to account for. How came he to

make the assertion he has made? There are only three possible suppositions. First, he did not mean to speak the truth, but to deceive; secondly, he meant to speak it, but was mistaken as to what the truth was; thirdly, he was both honest and well-informed,—he meant to tell the truth, and could not but have been acquainted with it. And, when the circumstances of the case are such as to forbid us to take up with any other supposition than this last, then we cannot escape from receiving the matter of the testimony as true, and it is by a process of reasoning that we have become satisfied of its truth.

This, I say, is the *rationale* of testimony, in all cases. It is by the external senses that we perceive what testimony, in a given case, is. It is by an exercise of the reasoning faculty that we decide on its validity; in other words, that we determine whether we ought to receive or to reject what it vouches for. It might perhaps have been thought sufficient for me to urge that any account of the sources of knowledge, which excludes testimony, would be but a mere contradiction to the common sense of men; but I trust it will not be thought superfluous to have made these few observations by way of showing, that the author's enumeration of the avenues between the human mind and truth, (whether adequate in other respects or not, it would be here out of place to inquire,) is, as to the question of the worth of testimony, not at all to the purpose. It leaves the whole province of

testimony uninvaded, with all the ample prerogatives that a considerate mind ascribes to it.

Now supernatural revelation, as has been said, is a kind of testimony. It claims to be precisely that, and nothing else. And the question, as far as concerns the laws of belief now under consideration, has just the length and breadth of this, which every one knows how to answer ; — whether testimony, provided it answers the proper conditions as to kind and degree, is a reasonable foundation of belief. And thus we come to that saying of the Master, than which nothing can more completely recommend itself to a sound philosophy, that, “if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater.” Why greater? Because, as to the witness of men, two questions always have to be asked. Can they be inclined to deceive others? Can they be deceived themselves? It is impossible that God should be either. It is certain that all to which God is witness is true, because, when he makes any communication, he certainly designs to declare the truth, and he certainly knows what the truth is. When, therefore, a testimony produced by man is alleged to be prompted by God, whom we cannot see or hear, all that we need to inquire, is, whether it is really God who is bearing that testimony. Here a different office for the reason occurs. The fact that it is God virtually, who is testifying through one entrusted with his message, is not to be admitted without proof. But it is a fact capable of proof. Our Lord, when he said, “The

words which I speak are not mine, but the Father's which sent me,"— "If ye believe not me, believe the works,"— "The father that dwelleth in me, he doth the works,"— when he said these things, and at the same time exhibited his credentials, in works obviously within the power of the omnipotence of the Universal Ruler alone, then he put together a perfect demonstration of the fact, that the witness which he bore was God's witness; and so rested its contents securely on that highest evidence of the divine veracity.

I had already set down these views, when it occurred to me to turn to Locke's chapter "On the Degrees of Assent" in the "Essay concerning Human Understanding;" and before leaving the topic I cannot do better than to confirm what has been said by a short extract from that chapter. After remarking upon the grounds and conditions of the convincing force of common testimony, that admirable philosopher goes on to say, "There is one sort of propositions that challenge the highest degree of assent upon bare testimony, whether the thing proposed agree or disagree with common experience, and the ordinary course of things, or no. The reason whereof is, because the testimony is of such a one as cannot deceive, nor be deceived, and that is of God himself. This carries with it assurances beyond doubt, evidence beyond exception. This *testimony* is called by a peculiar name, *revelation.*" \*

\* *Essay, &c.* Book iv. chap. 16, § 14.

It is on a condition, then, of the alleged recipient of a revelation, that Lord Herbert rests his argument of the impossibility of a revelation being made. Dr. Tindal, on the other hand, draws his conclusion to the same effect from a condition of the alleged giver of the revelation. He deduces the impossibility of special revelation from considerations of the immutability of the divine nature. This is some of his language on the subject, and the like is repeated in different parts of his book. “From the time Christianity commenced, you must own God is mutable; and that such additions have been made to the all-perfect laws of infinite wisdom, as constitute a new religion. The reason why the law of nature is immutable is, because it is founded on the unalterable reason of things. But, if God is an arbitrary being, and can command things merely from will and pleasure,—some things to-day, and others to-morrow,—there is nothing either in the nature of God, or in the things themselves, to hinder him from perpetually changing his mind.” \*

All who are acquainted with the history of religious discussion have had occasion to observe, that there is no other topic which has been more loosely and feebly discoursed upon than this of the divine immutability. God’s unchangeableness, understood as many seem to conceive of it, so far from being his great perfection, from which the most certain conclusions respecting his agency might be

\* *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, chap. 6, (p. 61.)

deduced, would be as far as possible from being any perfection or excellence whatever. Is God unchangeable in his special relations to his creatures and his world? in his manifestations of himself? in his methods of operation, if operation could then be predicated of him? That would be to ascribe to him the position of an Epicurean deity; to deny that he exercises a providence; to preclude him from the happiness of action (for what is action but change, change both in the agent and in the subject?)—to strip him of that paternal character, which does not crush the free agency of the child, but allows it to produce its often wayward results, and then interposes with the additional or different protection or aid, which the altered circumstances have made requisite. God could not be unchangeable in his perfections,—unchangeable in the principles and spirit of his government,—unchangeable in his rectitude, wisdom and love,—unless his methods of dealing with his children were changed from time to time, so as to correspond with the altered circumstances, into which, from time to time, they were brought in the exercise of their own free will or by force of some foreign influence. The Judge of all the earth is immutable, because he will always do that which is right. But the right to be done, is itself determined by the occasion for action; and as long as there is endless mutability in human things, there will be a corresponding variety in the operations of God.

Accordingly, in an endeavour to prove that the

alleged revelation of Christianity conflicts with the doctrine of the divine immutability, the only reasonable medium of proof would be to show, that all the existing need of that religion, and all the advantages for its favorable reception and spread,— all the capacity of men to adopt, value, preserve and use it,— all the demands for it, in short, of whatever kind,— all the sad experience of sin and folly consequent upon the absence of such a guide,— and all the preparation for estimating the desolation that had been and the relief that had come,— which existed at the time of its publication, had existed alike at some earlier period. Nay; it would be necessary to go further, and to show not only that the fulness of time had brought no additional reasons cognizable by us for its intervention, but that it could by possibility have brought none cognizable by the Divine Mind. Putting out of the question our being able, at the era of the Christian revelation, to see peculiar reasons for it, he who, from the immutability of the divine Being, should propose to demonstrate the impossibility of that revelation, because his sagacity could not discern any peculiar fitness for it in point of time or occasion, would be well on his way towards the presumption of arguing that it was incredible that the sun shone yesterday, because the rain fell all the day before. It will be no superfluous modesty in us to own, that God knows his own occasions, and may manifest himself differently,— and that, without a change of his prin-

ciples of action,—even though we should be left at a loss respecting the principle of the variation.

I observed, near the beginning of this Lecture, that, of the four propositions into which I had resolved the theory now before us, two, namely the first and fourth, were of that nature, that the unbelieving disputant, provided he found that certain facts implied in them, or bearing upon them, could be established, would be authorized to maintain them with a degree of confidence, while with respect to the second and third, this would be by no means equally true.

It has, I trust, been by this time made to appear, that this remark holds good concerning the second, which is a purely speculative proposition, and, in all respects in which inquiry does not satisfy us of its incorrectness, must be owned to belong to a region of speculation which the modest inquirer treads with extreme caution.

The third proposition is, that a special divine communication of religious truth to men *ought not* to be made. When I apply to this the same observation of the difficulty which a right mind, in any state of its knowledge, will find in advancing it, the justness of the remark will little require any support of argument. Undoubtedly we may state strong cases, as to which we should feel entitled to say with confidence, that such or such a thing ought not to be done by a divine agency;—in other words, that the doing of it would be inconsistent with the attribute of rectitude in the divine

agent. But clearly, to justify such a confidence, the cases must be strong; and this for the obvious reasons, that the rightfulness of a course or an action depends upon the relations of the things designed to be affected by it; and that relations of a thing, known to God, but not known to us, may be fit to determine a course or action affecting it to be eminently right, which to us, purely through our ignorance, appears to bear the opposite character.

But as to any appearance of truth in the assertion now before us, how does the matter stand? “God ought not to make to his children any special revelation of religious truth.” Why not? Because it would be calling on them to renounce the guidance of their reason, which it would be wrong for him to do. This is the substance of remarks often urged in the work of Dr. Tindal. For instance; “Must not that rule, which can annul any other, be not only the supreme, but the sole rule? For, as far as men take any other rule, so far they lose of their perfection, by ceasing to be governed by this rule, in conformity to the nature, and in imitation of the perfect will, of God.”\* And elsewhere; “The holy ghost can’t deal with men as rational creatures, but by proposing arguments to convince their understandings, and influence their wills, in the same manner as if proposed by other agents; for to go beyond this, would be making impressions on man, as a seal does on wax, to the confounding of their reason, and their liberty in choosing; and the

\* *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, chap. 14, (p. 367.)

man would then be merely passive, and the action would be the action of another being, acting upon him, for which he could be no way accountable.”\*

Merely calling attention briefly to the fact, that this argument implies an absolute contradiction of a suggestion, thrown out in other parts of the book, and awaiting our consideration under the next head,—namely, that the evidence produced for revelation falls short of being strictly undeniable and compulsory,—I ask if it does not betray a mere confusion of ideas. To bring men new information, the evidence of which, (that is, the credibility of the testimony which declares it,) their reason is to weigh, the import of which their reason is to apprehend, the applications of which their reason is to make, what is that, I ask, but to deal with them as rational creatures? How is that, in the nature of a command to them to renounce their reason? “To go,” it is said, “beyond the method of proposing arguments to convince men’s understandings and influence their wills, would be making impressions on men, as a seal does on wax, to the confounding of their reason, and their liberty in choosing.” If this be true, in any sense requisite to give it pertinency to the argument in which it occurs, then it follows that the witness on the stand, who acquaints those whom it may concern with something known to him,—something which they must know from

\* *Christianity, &c. chap. 12. (p. 199.)*

him, or else not at all,—something which they could never perceive by any intuition, external or internal, nor seize upon by any instinct, nor work out by any demonstration,—that witness is making impressions on others, as a seal does on wax, to the confounding of their reason, and their liberty in choosing. The doctrine lies within the most manageable compass, and refuses to be obscured by any verbiage. A man who knows more than another, may convey his better information to that other, and give satisfaction, through an exercise of the recipient's reason, that he is speaking the truth;—in other words, that it is the truth that is spoken. God knows more than all men. Something which he knows, relating to their duty and prospects, it exceedingly imports them to know too. He informs them of it, giving them, at the same time, the proper proof that it is by him that the information is conveyed. But, while he addresses their reason with that evidence, and enlarges its range of action with new facts, with what suitableness can it be said that he is commanding that their reason be renounced?

Again; a special divine communication of religious truth to men ought not to be made, because to impose upon men any obligations, additional to those under which they had always lain, would be a course inconsistent with the divine rectitude. The language of Tindal to this point is of extraordinary strength. “I think,” he says, “I have fully proved from the nature of God and man, and the

relations we stand in to him and one another, that the divine precepts can't vary ; and that these relations, which are the permanent voice of God, by which he speaks to all mankind, do at all times infallibly point out to us our duty in all the various circumstances of life. Should revelation require less than these relations require, [the expression here is equivocal, but the strain of the argument determines how the author meant the word *require* to be understood, that is, in the sense of *making known* the requisition,] would it not be an imperfect rule ? And if it enjoins more, would it not argue the author of it to be of a tyrannical nature, imposing on his subjects, and under most severe penalties, unnecessary things ; and likewise show a design, not of being beloved, but of being hated and dreaded ? ” \* And again ; “ If any instituted religion varies from the religion of nature and reason in any one particular, nay, in the minutest circumstance, [and the context shows what is meant here by *variation*, — that is, not contradiction only, but also a mere difference of less or more,] that alone is an argument, which makes all things else that can be said for its support totally ineffectual.” † And in yet another place ; “ Can there be a greater proof of its truth, [that is, of the truth of the system of natural religion recommended,] than that it is, in all its parts, so exactly calculated for the good of mankind, that either to add to, or take from it, will be to their manifest prejudice ? ” ‡

\* *Christianity, &c.* chap. 3, (p. 31.)      † *Ibid. chap. 6, (p. 60)*

‡ *Ibid. chap. 14, (p. 422.)*

I conceive it to be always due to the dignity, as well as fairness, of discussion, in an important question, especially in one belonging to the venerable subject of religion, to avoid all appearance of treating with slight any thing which in good faith is set forth as argument ; but I own I find a difficulty in dealing with this, in a manner to give it the consideration due to a sincerely intended objection from an eminent source. There are two sorts of argument, which perplex a controvertist ; one, the very strong ; the other, the very feeble ; the latter, both because of their not offering something substantial and definite to assail, and because the little force which can be allowed to them, and the poor figure which they make in a reply, create the suspicion that the statement does not do them perfect justice, and that the writer meant something more by them, which is slurred over and evaded by his opponent. Nothing more can be done to meet this embarrassment than to quote the writer's own words, which I have done in the present instance ; and they are words from which, and from the connexion of which, no other meaning can be extracted, than that it would be tyranny in God to lay on men, at any time, any commands additional to commands previously received by them.

Certainly, this is a principle of a character quite at war with those commonly recognised in the like premises ; — so much so as to make it difficult to account for its being so confidently advanced, except by understanding that it was caught up

as a mere appendage to a theory, without due attention either to its abstract reasonableness or to its practical bearings. Certainly it is no hardship for a parent, with reference to the altered circumstances, capacities, dispositions, temptations of his child, to address to him new directions, or (for the case will bear a stronger statement) to lay him absolutely under new obligations by means of giving him further instruction concerning his duty. It is not a hardship in governments to make new laws for the benefit of their subjects. They will do it most reasonably and equitably; and that, not merely because they have themselves become enlightened by experience, and know better what laws are needed, (which, of course, is a condition of change not applicable to the divine lawgiver,) but because the subjects have come into a condition, which calls for the new legislation in a way that it had not been called for before. And how is it to be maintained, that a course, which, in its principles, is avowedly right and provident, when adopted by a parent in educating his children, or by rulers in profiting their subjects, should be otherwise than right and provident in the Universal Parent and Ruler in educating and profiting his world?

Even in the strongest producible case, and that which the argument we are considering most frequently and confidently puts forward as its main point,—that of positive institutions of external service, or worship,—nothing, I submit, can be more undeniable than the equity of the principles

involved. That may be made our duty, through the command of a superior, which, independently of his command, would be no duty whatever. And it may be made not only our duty, but our profitable duty; profitable not only through the reward which its observance will bring, according to the superior's good pleasure, but by means of its being an expression, and so a confirmation, of our spirit of obedience; and, it being thus profitable to us, the injunction of it will be seen to be by no means an oppression on the superior's part, but, on the contrary, a bounty. A parent may prescribe something to his child, to be done simply as an expression of the child's respect and love, without its pretending to any other merit; and, merely by force of its being thus prescribed, it becomes an act of filial duty, acceptable on the one side, and attractive and full of pleasure on the other. Should God prescribe any thing to us, of the nature of mere external or ritual service, and we be unable to see that it had any inherent worth or fitness, that alone would not prove it to be merely indifferent; — it might be only our ignorance that was in fault. But suppose it was indifferent in itself, and known to be so, still, from the moment that it was commanded, it would be not wrongfully, but kindly, made our duty, being converted into an expression, and consequently a confirmation, of those devout sentiments and affections, which it is abstractly and independently right for us in all ways to express and cherish.

The remaining doctrine of the system under consideration is, that if, after all, a special divine communication of religious truth was to be made, *it would not have been such as is actually offered in Christianity.* It would have been different, not in respect to its contents ; — objections have indeed been also made to them, but such objections belong not so much to the *à priori* argument, as to a later part of the discussion ; — but it would have been different in respect to the general conditions of its communication and action. Proceeding from a perfect Being, it is said, it would have partaken of his perfection. It would have had absolute universality and completeness, in particulars in which it is allowed on all hands that Christianity has neither. It would have been universal in its original publication, and not been made known, in the first instance, to one people. It would have been perfect in its evidence, forcing conviction, admitting no possibility of unbelief or doubt. It would have been perfect in the execution of its office, working a complete renovation and elevation of the human character, and not allowing men to remain partially enlightened and reformed as they are. Wanting these characteristics, it cannot be received as having proceeded from the divine Author to whom it is ascribed. *Because God is perfect, therefore his work must be so too.* Wanting perfection, it does not bear his mark. It is not worthy of him. “Can laws be imperfect, where a legislator is absolutely perfect ?” Such is the question asked

by Tindal,\* as if there were demonstration in its terms, and also with a singular oversight of its bearing on his own doctrine ; for certainly the laws of natural religion, whatever else they were, were not perfectly operative. And again ; “ No religion can come from a being of infinite wisdom and perfection, but what is absolutely perfect.” †

This doctrine requires to be considered, with a view to show in what sense it is in its general statement true, and in what false ; and especially in regard to its application to the three principal particulars which have been specified, namely, those of the original limited revelation of Christianity ; its evidence, falling short of a coercion of the mind ; and its hitherto partial reforming effect ; — the first of which, as we have had repeated occasion to observe, attracted the attention of the ancient unbelieving writers. ‡ Some observations upon this topic in these relations, together with some remarks upon the works of three authors, one of whom in one way, and the two others in another, have exerted an important influence on the spirit and tone in which revealed religion has been treated in more recent times, will occupy my next Lecture, and terminate the present Course.

\* *Christianity, &c.* chap. 6. (p. 60.)      † *Ibid.* chap. 1. (p. 3.)

‡ See above, pp. 20, 54, 63, 94.

## LECTURE XVI.

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DEISTICAL *A PRIORI* OBJECTIONS, FURTHER CONSIDERED.—  
SKEPTICAL TENDENCY OF CERTAIN PHILOSOPH-  
ICAL WRITINGS.—CONCLUSION.

My last Lecture was occupied with a consideration of what I had denominated the *Deistical à Priori Argument*, that is, the argument against Christianity, not drawn from a consideration of its alleged proofs, in order to show that, in point of fact, such a supernatural revelation of religious truth has not been made, but drawn from antecedent considerations of the perfections of God and the circumstances of his world, with a view to show an unreasonableness in the supposition that it would be made. The heads of the argument bearing upon this result, as urged in different parts of the works of Lord Herbert and Matthew Tindal, I said might be concisely stated in these four propositions;

1. A supernatural revelation to men of religious truth did not need to be made ;
2. It could not be made ;
3. It ought not to be made ;
4. If made, it would not have been such, as to its general conditions, as that which we have in Christianity.

The first three of these propositions have already been treated, with considerations designed to refute them. The sense of the fourth, when drawn out into particulars, is, that, if God had designed to make a revelation of himself, it would have had a completeness of three sorts, different from what, on all hands, Christianity is allowed to have had.  
1. It would not have been given, in the first instance, to a single people, but to all mankind alike ; 2. It would have been accompanied with a perfect controlling evidence, so as to compel the conviction of every mind ; 3. It would have been such as to produce perfectly its designed effect, and make its disciples vastly better men than it has made them.

The general ground for such propositions will be seen, as soon as I state it, to be absolutely indefensible. “A religion,” says Tindal, “coming from the author of all perfection, must, as worthy of its divine original, be wholly perfect.”\* Nothing can be less true than this assertion, which, with little variety of expression, is repeated in different parts

\* *Christianity as Old as the Creation, &c.* chap. 13. (p. 283.)

of the treatise. Though it strikes the ear as having the authority of a maxim, and must in that way have deceived its author as to its force, it owes the appearance to nothing but its being a play upon words. Who can pretend to say, that every thing which God has made must be perfect? Where can we get that characteristic of perfect power, that it shall make none but perfect things;—a characteristic, indeed, which would obviously be a limitation of it, and cause it not to be perfect? The only sense, in which the proposition has any appearance of truth, is this; that whatever God does must be perfect as to its end. But many results, perfect in themselves, may be produced by a combination of imperfect means, and may even require an application of means, singly considered, imperfect, in order to produce them; and if that were the meaning,—if, in alleging imperfection in Christianity, all that was intended was to impute imperfection of that kind,—the charge would not be of a nature to create the slightest presumption against its divine origin.

But, not further to theorize, the hasty assertion that whatever is created by a perfect God must be perfect in itself, is refuted by obvious fact. It has its downright contradictions in great part of the manifold appearances of nature. Without imperfection, indeed, in the parts, it would be impossible that there should be variety, and mutual dependence and connexion, in the whole; and variety and mutual dependence are themselves traits of per-

fection, which God's universe could not spare without ceasing to be as excellent as it is.

So much for the general doctrine, which will not bear a moment's looking at. As to particulars, the first alleged presumption against Christianity, as being what it claims to be, a message from God to men, is found in its having been revealed not to all men, but to a portion of them. "Is it not incumbent on those," it is asked by Dr. Tindal, "who make any external revelation so necessary to the happiness of all mankind, to show how it is consistent with the notion of God's being universally benevolent, not to have revealed it to all his children, when all had equal need of it? Was it not as easy for him to have communicated it to all nations as to any one nation, or person? or in all languages, as in any one?"\* Again; "If a revelation was extremely desirable, and highly useful to a world overrun with ignorance and superstition, the same reason, which obliged God to grant it to some, would have obliged him to grant it to all to whom it was equally useful, and who equally deserved it as well as equally wanted it."†

I remark, first, that this argument imports, that, when God bestows any blessing, greater or less, in

\* *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, chap. 12. (p. 196.)

† *Introduction to the Second Part of Christianity as Old as the Creation*, p. xiv. This Second Part was never printed. Of the extremely rare *Introduction* to it, to which I have referred before, there is an imperfect copy, extending to thirty-two pages (perhaps all that ever passed through the press) among the books of Harvard College, presented by Thomas Hollis.

any quarter, he is bound to bestow it universally, and that too at the same time ; — a principle which, if good for any thing, would go very much further than even the very broad terms of its statement. Certainly, one man, who has not a thing, is injured, if at all, by that want of his own, and not by another's having it ; so that the principle would go to the full extent of showing, that, if God had any blessing capable of being conferred, and not yet conferred in any quarter, he would be bound in justice to bestow it ; — in other words, that, at least to all his *intelligent* creatures (for at present we will not carry the argument to the still more extravagant consequences to which it would admit of being pushed), he would be obliged to give every thing that they were individually capable of receiving, and so to abolish all the variety which at present exists in the endowments and advantages of men, and with it, the occasion for all that large class of virtues, which grow out of their need of, and dependence upon, each other.

But whoever else might hold that argument, certainly it would not be the Deist, with whom we now are reasoning ; the Deist, who owns that the world has an intelligent Creator and Governor, and who must own it to be on no such principles, that, in point of fact, that intelligent Governor manages his world. If there were that presumption against Christianity, which the Deist alleges, arising from the want of universality in its communication, it would exist also against the same want of universal-

ity in the communication of other blessings, which however, in point of fact, are certainly not communicated universally. If the principle of divine operation, which the Deist affirms to be essential and uniform, (and so finds a presumption against revealed religion, which does not exhibit it,) were what he pretends, it would appear equally in other divine operations, which we perfectly well know do not develope it, but the contrary. The doctrine cannot be good in this case, because, if good in this, it would equally hold in others, where nothing can be more certain, than that it does not hold.

This argument is treated in his usual masterly manner by Bishop Butler, in his “*Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature.*” To use his language, which, in treating this class of topics, we must often be content to quote, or else to speak much less to the purpose, the objection is founded on a supposition “that God would not bestow any favor upon any man unless he bestowed the same on all; a supposition which we find contradicted not by a few instances in God’s natural government of the world, but by the general analogy of nature together.”\* “A system, or constitution,” he says again, “in its notion, implies variety, and so complicated a one as this world, very great variety. So that, were revelation universal, yet from men’s different capacities of understanding, from the different lengths of their lives, their different educations and other

\* *Analogy, &c.* Part II. chap. 6. (p. 288. Edit. Bost.)

external circumstances, and from their difference of temper and bodily constitution, their religious situations would be widely different, and the disadvantages of some in comparison with others, perhaps altogether as much as at present. And the true account, whatever it be, why mankind, or such a part of mankind, are placed in this condition of ignorance, must be supposed also the true account of our further ignorance, in not knowing the reasons why or whence it is that they are placed in that condition.” \*

He goes on to present some thoughts which, he says, “may deserve the serious consideration of those persons who think the circumstances of mankind, or their own, in this respect, a ground of complaint.” I will not repeat views which may be found in a work so accessible and well known, and which, from the nervous conciseness of the style, do not admit of being abridged, but rather present another, which has always struck my mind with great force. It is, I conceive, a pervading principle of the divine economy, as experience makes it known to us, to confer additional value upon the blessings it bestows, by bestowing them not immediately, but through the agency of human benefactors; thus laying on men a new obligation in respect to the benefit which God means to confer on their brethren through their means, and exciting in these latter a sentiment of gratitude to the human instrument, as well as to the divine source;

\* *Analogy, &c.* Part II. chap. 6. (p. 294.)

and so carrying out the great system of multiplying the ties which bind God's children to one another.

God might feed and clothe us, he might instruct and govern us, by his own immediate agency. There is something which we want, and which others have. He does not mean that we shall be without it, while they have it; and he might himself bestow it on us without any help of theirs. But this is not the method he commonly adopts. He means rather, that, when we have it, we shall receive it through them; and this, in order that, in addition to the benefit of the mere possession to be enjoyed by both, they may feel an impulse to profitable action, and we a sense of dependence on, and obligation for, their action; that they may have the satisfaction of giving, which will not only be a present pleasure, but exercise and educate them in one kind of virtue, and that we, who receive at their hands, may have sentiments called forth, which equally, in another way, belong to moral enjoyment and progress.

For such ends, it would seem, God, designing for us the boons of support, instruction, protection, places us in the way of instruments of his, for these blessings. He feeds and clothes us, not with his own hand and care, but by those of our parents. He instructs us through our teachers; he protects us by human governments. His benefactions are always pouring upon us; but they are poured through human channels. And if so in other particulars, then why not, unless the universal analogy of his opera-

tions is to be broken, in that of revealed religion? And, if so it is to be in respect to revealed religion, what is this but to declare, in other words, that the very state of things is to be, which is tortured into the objection we are now considering; — that is to say, that God, designing eventually to enlighten and convert all men, puts a portion of men in possession of the instrument for accomplishing that design; that he will Christianize the world by Christianizing first a part of it, and bidding them labor to bring about the further result. The ultimate object, for which they were privileged above others in the first instance, may, it is true, be delayed by their want of proper faithfulness to their trust. But this is but an unavoidable consequence of that moral system, which, proposing to train the human will, refuses in any instance to do it violence. It equally occurs in respect to other benefits, designed by God to be conferred by man on man. And, at all events, no presumption against the theory of God's intervention in a given instance can be furnished by its involving an accompaniment, which has equally attended his agency in cases where we know that he has acted.

But, to proceed to the second particular of alleged unworthy imperfection in the Christian revelation. “I can't help thinking,” says Dr. Tindal, “that an infinitely wise and good God has adapted the rules and evidences of what he really requires from mankind to their general capacity, and that the certainty of every command must be equal to the

importance of the duty.”\* And the argument, that religious instruction from God, in order to be accredited as such, ought to carry with it conclusive evidence, so as to leave no room for doubt in any mind upon questions relating to its origin, its transmission, or its interpretation, is urged with frequent repetitions, and in a variety of particulars.

Certainly, if this were so, that very religion of nature, from which the writers now under consideration derive their arguments against revealed religion, could not maintain the pretension of having proceeded from God. Certainly, whatever these writers, in devotion to their theory, may have persuaded themselves to account true, very few others will be prepared to admit, that the truths of natural religion had this absolutely clear and unquestionable evidence, which they affirm to be an essential attribute of a religion from God. If it had such evidence, how by possibility came it, that there ever was such a thing as an idolater or an atheist?

But why should evidence of such absolutely unavoidable and compulsory force be expected? Because God would not suffer himself to be defeated in what he undertook. To be sure, he would not. But what did he undertake? To produce infallible conviction on every mind? This is the very question at issue. How can you prove, that this is what he undertook? Will you say, that

\* *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, chap. 13. (p. 292.)

nothing short of this was worthy of him? How can that be made to appear? How is it to be shown, that it was unworthy of him to present reasonable grounds of conviction, unless they were also made overpowering? That it would not be unworthy of him, might be asserted from the fact, that, in respect to not a few other parts of knowledge,—and knowledge, too, not unimportant,—he does, in the common course of his providence, exhibit to us proof persuasive, and to most minds sufficient, but still not overpowering. And upon what kind of evidence is it, that, day by day, in the common course of life, we decide questions that excite us in the highest degree? Is it always, generally, frequently, evidence which leaves no room whatever for doubt, in a mind biassed by some cause to a wrong conclusion?

But not to stop in this, are we not able to see, (though, if we could not, it would be nothing which a satisfactory treatment of the argument would demand,) that the true idea of a religion designed for men's religious culture, would be in some respects inconsistent with that of its being accompanied by a weight of evidence, which should preclude the possibility of hesitation on the part of any mind? Does it not seem abstractly fit, that, in the process of obtaining our conviction of the divine origin of a certain offered means of religious improvement, as well as in our use of it when the conviction has been attained, there should be an exercise of our moral powers; which will be,

provided the evidence presented is such, and will not be, if it is not such, as to do its work upon us more or less effectually, according as we approach it in a spirit of seriousness and candor, with an aptitude for the perception of religious truth, with that desire for religious improvement which welcomes, or, at least, without that distaste for it which rejects, its means? And may not the difficulties, which to one man may appear to stand in the way of a religious belief, be regarded as bearing some analogy to the temptations, which, with another, stand in the way of a religious practice, — both of them making part of his probation, and liable to be disposed of in one way or another, according to his better or worse state of mind. May not this be? I ask. And there may be thought to be the more force in the question, when one considers the unquestionable effect exerted by the state of mind, in which we approach evidence, on the judgment which we pass upon it; an effect so well known, that in common prudence we avoid entertaining a question of interest, in our common affairs, in a moment of passion, for instance, or under the bias of any prejudice we can escape.

I submit these questions; but, if any one does not see cause to give them the answer which they seem to me to deserve, he is to be reminded that the great consideration of the resemblance between the evidence for Christianity and the evidence for most other important truth, in not being such as strictly to coerce the mind, still stands in undimin-

ished force. If the application of the principle in the one case is known to us by experience to be a character of the divine agency, shall we say that there has not been divine agency in another case, because there too that character appears ?

Once more ; the question is asked in the work now under consideration, “ Must not revelation have had its intended effect, and especially where its instruments of conveying extraordinary assistances are in great numbers and in great authority [it is the ministry, that here is meant] ; must it not have made Christians much more perfect, and excellent, than men could possibly be, when under times of unavoidable corruption ? ” \*

It would be quite safe, I conceive, to reply that it has made them so ; — to meet the question on the ground of fact, and say, that, in the instances which have best illustrated its force, Christianity has actually produced a higher type of the human character than was ever the product of any other influence ; and that, on the whole, it has given a superior elevation to society, and actually introduced into it new elements of manifest and important good, which meet all the fair demands of the question thus presented. If it must needs be pronounced to be not from God, because it has not made men perfect, that sentence must pass equally on those who bring the charge against it ; for what perfect society, or what perfect man, did Natural

\* *Christianity as Old as the Creation*, chap. 14. (p. 402.)

Religion ever yet form? That it has not made men perfect, is too true; but what ground is there for the pretence, that it should have done so under peril of being set aside as an imposture? To suppose an operative means, of any other kind than that of influence, is to put virtue, as a result, out of the question; for virtue is, of its nature, something voluntary. And how was any thing of the nature of mere influence to perfect men, or even to improve them in any degree, except by an action of their own wills; and in whatsoever degree their wills, under the operation of a beneficial influence, are reluctant or averse, what does that condemn but their wills, instead of the influence acting upon them?

The truth is, there is a double error on this subject; one, in expecting too much from an influence,—which Christianity is, else it would not respect men's wills, and accordingly could do nothing of its proper office,—one, I say, in looking to an influence for what an influence cannot do, since one element of its action lies out of itself, depending on the dispositions of the subject; the other, in seeking for what Christianity has effected in the wrong place. If we mean to learn what this influence has wrought, we must look to those on whom it has wrought; not to those, with whom it has perhaps come as little in contact as if they had lived in Pagan times. When the question is asked, what Christianity has done, presently we have recourse to history for a reply. But history will

not serve us well in the premises. History is in great part the record of the actions of men, whom Christianity has in no degree, or in a very partial degree, affected ; whose intelligent assent it has not won ; whose minds it has not occupied ; whose sentiments it has not trained ; whose attention it may have scarcely attracted. There are not wanting indeed monuments of its action, that stand out in history ; as the amelioration of the practices of war, the achievements of philanthropic enterprise called forth by various miseries of man, the elevation of the female sex. But the true places to which to look for the triumphs of Christianity are the homes and the hearts of the millions, whom, in successive ages, it has made good and happy, whom it has cheered in life, and sustained and tranquillized in death. If it has done little of this, it must be owned to have fallen short of the services, which were reasonably to be expected of what was sent into the world with such solemn preparation. But that will scarcely be maintained. If it has done much of this, — and further, if it has given intelligible pledges of being destined to do more and more, till the past time of its weakness shall perhaps bear but a small proportion to the duration and achievements of its exceeding power, — then it is unsafe to condemn it, as not potent enough to justify its pretension of having come from God.

With these remarks, I dismiss the consideration of this branch of the argument. If they have detained us long, it was because I knew not how

to make them more concise ; and, if the discussion cannot be called an attractive one, it however embraces topics, on which many minds feel a need of obtaining satisfaction.

It might be made a question whether the name of the famous Thomas Hobbes is to be properly placed, as it has commonly been, in the ranks of unbelief ; and the question is one not admitting of being disposed of by a simple affirmation or denial, but calling for one answer or the other according to the terms of some circumstantial statement of it. Hobbes lived at the time of the Commonwealth, and his high notions of royal prerogative are the key to his opinions upon most of the subjects he has treated. After publishing his religious views the most obnoxious to censure, he continued to attend the worship and receive the sacraments of the Church of England, and in all appropriate ways to manifest his attachment to that communion ; and, if he professed and defended sentiments which other minds would find irreconcileable for themselves with religious faith, this alone would prove no more than that he was an inconsistent believer, which certainly many men are whose belief is sincere. His great work entitled the “Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civile,” is perhaps, after the writings of Machiavelli, the greatest riddle in all literature. The notions of prerogative which are there asserted with unquestionable seriousness, and with extraor-

dinary resources of ability and learning, and force of style, are such that, simply announced, they would appear as mere absurdities, and be taken as only advanced in irony. Says Sir James Mackintosh, (who names him with Bacon, Descartes, and Grotius, as one of the four “ eminent persons, born in the latter half of the sixteenth century, that gave a new character to European philosophy in the succeeding age,”) “ Hobbes, rejecting the simple truth inculcated by Hooker, that ‘ to live by one man’s will is the cause of many men’s misery,’ embraced instead the daring paradox, that to live by one man’s will is the only means of all men’s happiness. Having thus rendered religion the slave of every human tyrant, it was an unavoidable consequence that he should be disposed to lower her character, and lessen her power over men ; that he should regard atheism as the most effectual instrument of preventing rebellion, at least that species of rebellion which prevailed in his time, and excited his alarms. The formidable alliance of religion with liberty haunted his mind, and urged him to the bold attempt of rooting out both these mighty principles.”\*

But the charge of atheism, or of any kind of infidelity, against Hobbes, cannot, as has been said, be made out by reference to any express avowal of his own to that effect. On the contrary, when, in treating of the sources of religion, and finding

\* *General View of the Progress of Ethical Philosophy, &c.* p. 319.  
(Edit. Edin.)

them to be three, namely the desire of men to search for causes, the reference of every thing that has a beginning to some creative cause, and the observation of the order and consequence of things, he goes on to say, that the ignorance of causes makes men fear some invisible agent, like the gods of the Gentiles, but the investigation of them leads us to a God eternal, infinite and omnipotent,\* the manner in which investigation is opposed by him to ignorance may seem, in a fair interpretation of his words, to denote that what the writer mentions as the fruit of investigation was also the persuasion of his own mind. This however would bring us to nothing further than his assertion of belief in the fundamental truth of natural religion ; and, when he proceeds to speak of different forms of religion, he says, that “in these four things, opinion of ghosts, ignorance of second causes, devotion towards what men fear, and taking of things casual for prognostics, consisteth the natural seed of religion, which, by reason of the different fancies, judgments, and passions of several men, have grown up into different ceremonies.”†

But not to pursue the inquiry into this writer’s own religious or anti-religious creed, which, being a subject for inquiry, cannot of course be a prominent subject for contradiction and argument, I proceed to state, which will be best done in his own words, the peculiar doctrine, with a view to which I have referred to him ; namely, that of the

\* *Leviathan*, Part I. chap. 12. (pp. 52, 53.)

† Ibid. (p. 54.)

religious profession and practice of every individual being a thing absolutely determinable by the supreme human authority.

“The question,” says he, “is not what any Christian has made a law, or canon, to himself (which he might again reject, by the same right he received it); but what was so made a canon to them, as without injustice they could not do any thing contrary thereunto. That the New Testament should in this sense be canonical, that is to say, a law, in any place where the law of the Commonwealth had not made it so, is contrary to the nature of a law. For a law (as hath been already shown) is the commandment of that man, or assembly, to whom we have given sovereign authority, to make such rules for the direction of our actions, as he shall think fit; and to punish us, when we do any thing contrary to the same. When therefore any other man shall offer unto us any other rules, which the sovereign ruler hath not prescribed, they are but counsel and advice; which, whether good or bad, he that is counselled may without injustice refuse to observe; and, when contrary to the laws already established, without injustice cannot observe, how good soever he conceiveth it to be,—I say he cannot in this case observe the same in his actions, nor in his discourse with other men; though he may without blame believe his private teachers, and wish he had the liberty to practise their advice, and that it were publicly received for law. For internal faith is in its own nature invisible, and consequently ex-

empted from all human jurisdiction ; whereas the words and actions, that proceed from it, as breaches of our civil obedience, are injustice both before God and man. Seeing then our Saviour hath denied his kingdom to be in this world, seeing he had said, he came not to judge, but to save, the world, he hath not subjected us to other laws than those of the Commonwealth ; that is, the Jews to the law of Moses, which he saith he came not to destroy, but to fulfil, and other nations to the laws of their several sovereigns, and all men to the laws of nature ; the observing whereof both he himself and his apostles have in their teaching recommended to us, as a necessary condition of being admitted by him in the last day into his eternal kingdom, wherein shall be protection, and life everlasting. Seeing then our Saviour and his apostles left not new laws to oblige us in this world, but new doctrine to prepare us for the next ; the books of the New Testament, which contain that doctrine, until obedience to them was commanded by them that God had given power to on earth to be legislators, were not obligatory canons, that is, laws, but only good and safe advice, for the direction of sinners in the way to salvation, which every man might take and refuse at his own peril, without injustice.

“ Again ; our Saviour Christ’s commission to his apostles and disciples was to proclaim his kingdom (not present, but) to come ; and to teach all nations ; and to baptize them that should believe ; and to enter into the houses of them that should re-

ceive them ; and, where they were not received, to shake off the dust of their feet against them ; but not to call for fire from heaven to destroy them, nor to compel them to obedience by the sword. In all which there is nothing of power, but of persuasion. He sent them out as sheep unto wolves, not as kings to their subjects. They had not in commission to make laws ; but to obey, and teach obedience to, laws made ; and consequently they could not make their writings obligatory canons, without the help of the sovereign civil power. And therefore the Scripture of the New Testament is there only law, where the lawful civil power hath made it so.”\*

I do not undertake a refutation of this theory, which to any of my hearers, or to any one but a friend to the most arbitrary principles of government, would be wholly a work of supererogation. But I refer to it as having, in my opinion, had much to do with one of the most dangerous forms of unbelief which have appeared in Protestant communities ; a form of it, which prevails extensively in England, and which, by infecting the literature of that country, and habituating those who use parts of that literature to a false tone of thought and feeling, extends itself still more widely. The unbelief, which avows itself, will define itself also, and so will be met and examined, and may come to see its own error, and at least will be checked in its tendency to spread. But that unbelief in Christianity, which still ad-

\* *Leviathan*, Part III. chap. 42. (pp. 284, 285.)

heres to a Christian profession and worship by force of an argument which half satisfies it that it does honestly in so doing,—the unbelief, which half fancies itself belief,—keeps out of the reach of confutation, and with the semblance of conviction protects itself against being convinced. If I mistake not, this has been the position of a large class, in the parent country, whose writings we read; great champions of the religion, of which however they believe nothing, because they have not inquired into its evidence, and hold that it does not become them to inquire; good Christians in profession,—perhaps intolerant Christians,—because to be so they understand to belong to the character of good subjects; fast friends to the faith, because to be so is a part of allegiance to the state. If I mistake not, this sort of feeling is in a degree a traditional remnant of the vast influence exerted at the time, on the high prerogative party, by the writings of Hobbes; and though, under other political institutions, there would be no opportunity for it to stand on its original and proper basis, still the view of Christianity, as something to be professed, and in some sort received, by reason of its claims as a useful engine of government, may be found to recommend itself by force of frequent virtual exhibitions of it in that light, independently of any philosophical theory in which it may have been elaborately propounded.

I am to make brief mention of two other writers, who have not furnished us with any argument

against Christianity on which to comment, but who demand notice because of the great influence exerted by their works on the tone of infidel speculation in more recent times. For the first, we have to go back to an earlier period than that of either of the last three authors mentioned.

Montaigne, one of the most popular of writers, the first, I suppose, to set the fashion of that popular form of composition, the Essay, and who has never been excelled in it, was born in the year 1533. "As a writer," says La Harpe, "he impressed upon the French language a sort of familiar energy which it did not before possess. . . . As a philosopher, he painted man as he is, without embellishing his subject from complaisance, or disfiguring it from misanthropy. His writings have a character of good faith, peculiar to themselves. While engaged with them, one does not read a book, but listen to a conversation. He persuades the more, because he makes no show of instructing. He speaks much of himself, but in such a way as to make you think of yourself. He is neither vain, nor tedious, nor hypocritical, three things extremely hard to avoid when the writer is his own subject. He is never dry and abstract. His own mind and character pervade every thing. And what a mass of thought on every subject; what a treasure of good sense; what a mutual confidence is there, when the story he tells is also the reader's own! . . . His Essays are the book of all who read, and even

\* *Cours de Littérature.* Tome IV. (pp. 62, 63.)

of those who do not read.”\* Hallam speaks of these Essays as marking “in several respects an epoch in literature, less on account of their real importance, or the novel truths they contain, than of their influence on the taste and the opinions of Europe. They are,” he adds, “the first *provocatio ad populum*, the first appeal from the Porch and the Academy to the haunts of busy and of idle man, the first book that taught the unlearned reader to observe and reflect for himself on questions of moral philosophy. . . . No prose writer of the sixteenth century has been so generally read, nor probably given so much delight.\*

The connexion of this writer with our subject does not arise from his having defended any form of infidel opinion. He never distinctly defended or avowed any opinion on the subject. Nor do I suppose that it would be even safe to affirm, that he was a doubter respecting the truth of Christianity. It might be nearer to the fact to represent him as never having thought sufficiently on the subject even to doubt about it in good earnest. But he was a doubter about most things, which he did consider. That was characteristically the tone of his discussion; and the skeptical leaning of the understanding of so popular a writer, and the great indifference of his temperament, could not fail to exert a strong influence on crowds of admirers, and prepare them to deal with religion after the manner

\* *Introduction, &c.* Vol. II. pp. 169, 170.

that he had dealt with so many other things. He was the literary model and master of La Mothe le Vayer, one of the first avowed French infidels; and his writings, being speedily translated into English, became an extremely favorite book in the profligate time of King Charles the Second. And, while the influence of Hobbes's speculations has, as I conceive, been ever since felt in the circle of those who would uphold religion as a machine of policy, that of the Essays of Montaigne has been equally manifested in the school of the triflers and scoffers,—of that numerous class whose condemnations of Christianity have amounted simply to an exercise of wit.

This latter class of skeptics, whether intentionally or not on his part, have had, at a later time, another patron in the still more famous Bayle. While he treats with great levity matters relating to revealed religion, and understood by one or another class of believers to be comprised in it, I know not whether in his voluminous writings a sentence can be pointed out, where he speaks of revelation itself except with a respect apparently sincere. No terms can be stronger than those in which he expresses his persuasion of the being of God, and of the immateriality of the thinking principle, and his astonishment that any can profess to entertain a contrary belief; \* and, in his treatment

\* E. g. *Pensées Diverses*. §§ 104, 107. (*Œuvres*, Tome III. pp. 71, 73. Edit. La Haye). *Continuation des Pensées Diverses*, § 73. (Ibid. p.

of opinions of different Christian sects, one often finds cause to think that he was not so much undertaking to refute any one of them, as amusing himself by showing how many subjects of dispute between them offered difficulties which they had not suspected. But his copious erudition,—accurate and profound, too, in some departments,—his extraordinary wit, penetration, and acuteness, his adroit as well as sprightly logic, were all pressed into the service of a general cavilling skepticism. Paradox attracted him more than truth. He had no sincere spirit of inquiry; none of that earnest desire to reason well, which is the necessary condition of good reasoning. This radical weakness of his mind he felt no scruple to avow. “A certain Pyrrhonism,” says he, in one of his letters, “is the most convenient thing in the world. With it, you may with impunity engage in argument with all comers, and set at defiance those reasonings drawn from opinions of your own, which are always so troublesome to deal with. You have never occasion to act on the defensive. You do not fear being retorted upon, since, maintaining nothing yourself, you abandon yourself with perfect freedom to all sorts of sophisms.”\* No wonder if his example taught his admirers to doubt and cavil about every thing, whether doubted by him or not; to mistake a happy witticism for an irrefragable proof;

293.) *Nouvelles de la République de Lettres*. Oct. 1686. Art. 8. (Ibid. Tome I. p. 671.) *Réponse aux Questions dun Provincial*. Part III. chap. 15. (Ibid. Tome III. p. 941.)

\* *Lettre VI. (Œuvres, Tome IV. p. 537.)*

and to adopt ridicule as being, what Lord Shaftesbury would have it to be, the test of truth.

The influence of these writers on the character of later assaults on revealed religion, I may hereafter have occasion in some instances to trace. Having in the present course of Lectures executed a plan, in which I hope it may be thought that there has been a sort of completeness, by attempting some account, first, of the Jewish objections to Christianity; secondly, of the Pagan objections; and, thirdly, of the deistical *à priori* objections; followed by a brief notice of the influence of three writers, whom I conceive to have done much towards giving a tone to later habits of thought upon the subject; my next object would be to take a survey of the principal topics of infidel argument in more recent times down to the present.

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COURSE III.

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SURVEY OF THE OPINIONS OF SEVERAL  
MODERN WRITERS.



## LECTURE XVII.

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### OBJECTIONS OF LORD SHAFTESBURY AND LORD BOLINGBROKE.

IN commencing, last winter, a course of remark upon the objections which have been made, from time to time, to Christianity, by disbelievers of that religion, I suggested that the reasons successively produced by that acute and industrious class of writers in justification of their dissent, might safely be presumed to be all the reasons that were to be had, or, at any rate, the best reasons ; so that, should they prove, on examination, to be without cogency, the fair inference would be, that the divine origin of Christianity stood unimpeached and unimpeachable. If, as to the facts of that religion, there was any thing falsely alleged by its early disciples, its early adversaries were favorably circumstanced for an exposure of the fraud ; if in its theory there was any thing indefensible, the progress of intelligence would have aided its later opponents in dragging the error to light. Further, such a sur-

vey as was proposed might correct erroneous impressions respecting the extent of the resources of infidelity, while it would not unfrequently exhibit the champions of unbelief wresting its weapons from each other's hands, and would, in not a few instances, supply facts to the friend of Christianity in the form of admissions of its early foes, which in that form might be thought more valuable, because more unquestionable, than any assertion on the part of its advocates.

I must not fatigue my present audience with a recapitulation,—which, however I might endeavour to condense it, would still cover considerable ground,—of the course heretofore pursued towards the filling out of this scheme. I confine myself to the few words necessary to indicate the point, from which we take our new departure. I gave an account of three controversies; 1. Of the controversy of Christianity with Judaism; 2. Of its controversy with Paganism; and, 3. Of that, which I called by the name of the *deistical à priori controversy*.

Under the first of these heads, I undertook to explain that state of the Jewish mind, which led to the general rejection of our religion, when first published, by that people, illustrating this subject from the New Testament, the writings of Josephus, and the Jewish Talmuds; and then proceeded to give a full account of the Dialogue of Justin Martyr with Trypho the Jew in the second century, of the contents of certain Jewish tracts of the Middle Ages, and of the modern discussion between the

Jew Orobio and Philip Limborch of Amsterdam. Under the second head, I presented an analysis of the hostile arguments of the Epicurean philosopher Celsus in the second century, of Porphyry, the Eclectic, in the third, and of Hierocles and the Emperor Julian in the fourth, as well as of writings of some of the Christian fathers, showing what were the objections of Paganism against Christianity before and at the time when it became the religion of the empire ; and in this review it was my object to point out, on the one hand, the invalidity of those objections under their several heads, and, on the other hand, to show how extremely material were the admissions of facts belonging to the history of Christianity, either distinctly or virtually made, at that early day, in the hostile quarters. Passing hastily over the ages of security against foreign assault, which elapsed between the political establishment of Christianity and the Protestant reformation, three hundred years ago, and making a few remarks on the general character of the modern infidel writings, I invited attention to what was called the *deistical à priori argument*, as exhibited in the writings of Lord Herbert of Cherbury and Matthew Tindal. And the course closed with a few observations on the writings of Hobbes, Montaigne, and Bayle, to the last two of which writers, though they maintained no argument against Christianity, was ascribed a considerable influence over the conduct of that argument in times succeeding their own.

The former survey, to which I refer, exhibited no modern writer, except Lord Herbert, as having appeared in declared opposition to the Christian faith, at any period earlier than a hundred and thirty years ago.\* With this exception, all set treatises of that sort, produced in Christian communities, belong in fact to that recent time. We are sometimes perhaps inclined to think, that the present is a perilous time for our religion ; but it would be expressing a wiser judgment to say, that its great battle was fought in the first half of the last century. England, from its political condition as well as from the philosophical and scrutinizing habits of the national mind, naturally took the lead of other nations, in both the attack and the defence. It was fully to be expected, that, when the Reformation had removed Christianity in Protestant countries from that basis of authority on which it had reposed for ages, the question would speedily come to be asked, whether it had any more stable foundation. It was asked and answered, at first, privately, in discourse between man and man ; and soon publicly, in able and learned controversial writings. And while Toland, Morgan, Woolston, Bolingbroke, Chubb, Collins, and other learned adversaries of the faith, a hundred years ago, left little unsaid, for disputants of the same character in

\* Though some of Toland's writings appeared at an earlier time, he did not take distinct infidel ground, till the publication of his *Pantheisticon* in 1720. And Charles Blount's works were only translations from Philostratus and Lord Herbert.

later time to supply, the inquiry to which they invited was pursued on the other hand by minds of such note as those of Addison, Warburton, Clarke, Locke, and Butler. It was then, as future history will record, that the credit of our religion passed through its great crisis. There is not much, in the writings of later infidels, which is not mere repetition of their abler predecessors.

That incredulity, which, in some quarters, was the natural consequence of the ignorance of the laity, in times preceding the Reformation, concerning the history of Christianity, and which could not fail to manifest itself sooner or later, and so to call for the knowledge which would dispel it, appeared the earlier in Great Britain, as has been hinted, on account of the course of public events in that nation. “Skepticism,” says the French writer Villemain, referring to the time of Cromwell, “both in respect to religion and to politics, was left as the refuse, as the extinguished cinder, of the recent conflagration which had wrapped all England.”\* It was in that period, it will be remembered, that the mind of Lord Herbert was trained; and doubtless similar biases were communicated to numerous other leading minds, which have not left their doubts on record. The social system, and with it the world of thought, received a new shock in the period immediately preceding and following the revolution, which brought the house of Orange to the English throne in 1688. The loose and super-

\* *Cours de Littérature Française*, Tome I. p. 142.

ficial tone of thinking of the licentious time of Charles the Second was further encouraged, as to the skeptical turn which it took in relation to all great subjects, by the popularity acquired, in the cultivated circles, by the writings of Montaigne, which were largely circulated in England in a translation. The stern and bitter bigotry of the Duke of York, afterwards James the Second, excited a sort of latitudinarian antagonism ; the friends of political liberty not unnaturally became free-thinkers in religion ; and the safe times of William and of Anne, next succeeding, favored the utterance of those misgivings and discontents, which, under such influences, not a few vigorous and accomplished minds had unhappily come to entertain.

The spirit and results of the English infidel arguments of this period are described by the German historian Stäudlin with a good sense and a justness of observation, not common with the writers of his nation. “In England,” says he, “Christianity was attacked with more calmness, discretion, and dignity than in France, since there men might write more freely, on that subject as on all others, as they had not public persecutions and penalties to dread, and might view the subject as one deeply concerning society and man, instead of looking at it through side lights, under an impulse of hatred to an hierarchy. . . . Yet the more these writings were read, the less on the whole did they injure religion, or weaken the attachment of the nation to the Christian faith. It might even be affirmed that

they injured it more abroad, than in the country of their origin.” \*

Of the writers, whom I am now to proceed to mention, the first, in point of time, was Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury. From his grandfather, the many-sided statesman of the time of the Commonwealth and of Charles the Second, he did not inherit that profligacy of political principle, which has made the name of the first Lord Shaftesbury one of the most unfavorably eminent in history; on the contrary, his dispositions in public and in private life were magnanimous, and the purity of his morals without stain. But, without doubt, other influences from his distinguished relative had unhappily biassed his mind. The elder Lord Shaftesbury, always immersed in intrigues, and utterly distrustful of those pretensions to virtue, which he knew would be for himself so idle, was, by temperament and the influences of the time, an infidel; and something of his style of thought could scarcely fail to be communicated to a youth, on whose education he bestowed a sedulous attention. The catastrophe of his life,—a martyrdom, as a partial view might well regard it, to religious and political bigotry combined,—might naturally create, in one interested in his fate, an estrangement from the apparent cause of his misfortunes. And another influence, which may be presumed to have acted powerfully on the mind of the noble author of the “Characteristics,” was the

\* *Geschichte der Theologischen Wissenschaften*, Th. II. s. 424.

friendship, which, at an early age, he formed in Holland with Peter Bayle, whose writings, as I formerly observed, while they have never directly attacked Christianity, deal with other great subjects in a light and skeptical vein, which it is no wonder that their admirers should catch, and apply to discussions of that religion. It is however not altogether without qualification, that Lord Shaftesbury is to be reckoned among unbelievers in Christianity. There is no evidence that he ever set himself deliberately to form an opinion upon the subject; and of the learning which would have been necessary to satisfy so sagacious a mind as his, that he was rejecting that religion on sufficient grounds, he certainly possessed but a small share. The disaffection towards it which had taken possession of his mind, was a matter of taste and feeling, rather than of conviction. Sir James Mackintosh says of him, “The enmity of the majority of churchmen to the government established at the Revolution, was calculated to fill his mind with angry feelings, which overflow too often, if not upon Christianity itself, yet upon representations of it closely intertwined with those religious feelings, to which in other forms, his own philosophy ascribes surpassing worth.”\*

Lord Shaftesbury’s writings, carefully prepared by himself, were published after his death in the year 1713, under the title of “Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times,” the greater part of the three volumes having however appeared

\* *View of the Progress of Ethical Philosophy*, p. 333.

in separate treatises during the last five years of his life. He who shall examine their extremely discursive contents with a view to ascertain their writer's religious sentiments, will have occasion to observe, in the first place, that he has left no room for doubt respecting his belief in a Deity, and in the reverence and worship due to him. "Man," he says, "is not only born to virtue, friendship, honesty, and faith, but to religion, piety, adoration, and a generous surrender of his mind to whatever happens from that supreme cause, or order of things, which he acknowledges entirely just and perfect."\*

He speaks of the Christian miracles, in a way to show that his own mind has failed to be impressed with their reality, but not in the way of presenting any view suited to shake the conviction of any other mind, or to afford opportunity for any argument in their defence. When, for instance, in that unpleasant vein of irony, in which Gibbon appears afterwards to have taken him for a model, he says, that, as to what is recorded of miracles in former ages, "he pretends not to frame any certain or positive opinion of his own, notwithstanding his best searches into antiquity, and the nature of religious record and tradition, but on all occasions submits most willingly, and with full confidence and trust, to the opinions by law established,"† — and more, in other places, to the same effect, — one sees that what he chiefly needed was, to look at the evidence with

\* *Characteristics, &c.* Vol. III. p. 224. (Edit. 5th.)

† Ibid. p. 71. Compare I. 360; II. 353; III. 316.

greater sobriety of mind, and that, had he so looked at it, he would not have spoken thus, whether convinced or still incredulous.

The same is true of his expression of doubts respecting the authenticity and integrity of the sacred books,—doubts extremely natural to be entertained, in the age when he lived, especially by a person inclined to historical skepticism, but which, had he lived at the present time, since the subject has been examined both by friends and foes, he would, if he had not abandoned them, at least have expressed with a different kind of specification. He approaches nearest to a distinct argument against Christianity in his complaints of it, as an ethical system, for not sufficiently enforcing the importance of friendship, love of kindred, and the virtues which uphold society;\* and in those speculations on the nature of virtue, in which he insists that it must be loved and practised without selfishness, for its own sake, and that any regard to reward consequent on its observance, or punishment on its violation, vitiates its motive, and so destroys its essence. But, as to the latter point, his own notion of disinterested goodness is certainly no higher than what the Gospel constantly enjoins; nor does the place which he himself with great zeal assigns, in a theory of morals, to the satisfactions incident to virtue, and the ill results of its opposite, at all differ from that assigned to them in the Christian scheme.† And, as to the other complaint,

\* *Characteristics, &c.* Vol. II. p. 68.

† *Ibid.* p. 99.

the aptness to all offices of friendship and patriotism, of a character formed under the Christian discipline, is so manifest,—while such good reasons appear, in the circumstances of the time when Christianity was revealed, why it should lay its chief stress on universal benevolence, or philanthropy, rather than on any such limitations of the sentiment as appear in love of friends or of country,—that such an objection can hardly be supposed to take a prominent place in any mind; nor is the cursory way, in which it is suggested by the writer now under our notice, such as to indicate that his own mind was much impressed with its validity.

I have considered it proper to say thus much of Lord Shaftesbury, because of his high traditional reputation, and of the early date of his speculations. But there is no defence of Christianity to be made against his writings, because in truth they do not contain a justification of his unbelief, but, at the most, a profession of it; and I think they might be put into the hands of almost any person of tolerable judgment at the present day without the slightest danger of shaking his faith. To say of him what Johnson said of Chesterfield, that he was “a wit among lords, and a lord among wits,” would indeed be totally unjust. To distinguished integrity, amiableness, and generosity, Lord Shaftesbury added the endowments of a lively, graceful, and accomplished understanding; but he had none of the proper preparation of learning for the discussion of that momentous subject of revealed religion, on

which he permitted himself to throw out his crude thoughts. In one of his notes, he makes some remarks on Seneca, which, with alterations for the diverse subjects of their inquiries, might not ill be applied to his own case. "There is great difference," he says, "between a courtier who takes a fancy for philosophy, and a philosopher who should take a fancy for a court. Now Seneca was born a courtier, being son of a court-rhetor; himself bred in the same manner, and taken into favor for his wit and genius, his admired style and elegance, not for his learning in the books of philosophy and the ancients [applied to Lord Shaftesbury, this should read, "not for his learning in the history or documents of the Christian faith."] For this indeed was not very profound in him. In short, he was a man of wonderful wit, fluency of thought and language, an able minister and honest courtier." \*

In making large application of his own maxim, that ridicule is the test of truth, † (his, I call it, but he borrowed it from Horace, ‡ who stated it with careful qualification,) Lord Shaftesbury often supposed himself to be arguing, when really he was doing nothing less. Indeed, instead of being a maxim, as it assumes to be, it is not so much as a truth. There are many things false, which so far from being fit to excite ridicule, cannot possibly be viewed except with grief or horror; while, on the other hand, every thing which wears an antiquated

\* *Characteristics, &c.* Vol. III. p. 24.

† *Ibid.* Vol. I. pp. 11, 13, 61, 128.

‡ *Sat.* I. i. 14.

costume, and is opposed to present conventionalisms, has, to such as look only on the surface, an air of ridicule, though it may enfold truth the most unassailable and momentous. The fallacy, however, to which Lord Shaftesbury gave currency, both by precept and example, has since been effectively used by Paine and other infidels of his class.

If I should limit myself to proceed strictly in the order of time, I should have to reserve for a somewhat later stage of these remarks, my notice of the opinions of Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke. But, as in the case of Tindal, whose writings, from the similarity of their argument, I treated, by anticipation, along with those of Lord Herbert, it is convenient now to place together the works of two authors, who not only in the circumstances of their social position, but in some characters of their minds and their speculations, exhibited traits of strong mutual resemblance. The splendid fame of the parliamentary eloquence of Bolingbroke rests wholly on tradition, no specimens of it having been preserved. It was such as to lead Lord Chatham to say, that, if the question were between recovering the lost books of Livy or of Tacitus, or a Latin Tragedy, or a speech of Bolingbroke, his choice would fall upon the last; and this judgment is fully borne out by the rich and polished eloquence of his written discourses, which, in the melody, point and vigor of their style, seem as if composed to be spoken. But they furnish nothing whatever to refute the inference, which is enforced by the whole

history both of the public and private life of their author, that he was destitute of that love of truth, which is the indispensable attribute of a really great man. It was not only, that, in the prosecution of the objects of his public career, he descended to the most flagitious perfidy, as he was too much warranted in doing by the example of other politicians of the day, but, what is more to our purpose, that there appeared a want of affinity between his mind and speculative truth, remarkable in a mind of such distinguished powers; so that the reader plainly sees, that he did not crave truth as the fruit of his inquiries; that he philosophized without any earnest care to convince, or even so much as to discover and determine; that he was almost satisfied with the ingenious, or even the superficial, suggestion of difficulties and objections, which he left to be solved by whoever might feel interest enough in the result. There are no doubt vigorous statements, in his works, of such objections to our religion, as naturally occur to, and deserve, the notice of one who would pass an intelligent judgment upon its claims. But there are others, which, in the way that they are thrown out, only serve to indicate the uninformed and unsettled state of the writer's mind, both in respect to their foundation in fact, and to their bearings on the main issue.

The writings in which the sentiments of Lord Bolingbroke concerning Christianity are expressed, were published, after his death in 1751, by the poet Mallet, to whom he had bequeathed them in his

will. They consist of a series of “Letters on the Study and Use of History,” and a number of “Essays” on metaphysical, moral and religious subjects, addressed to Alexander Pope. The discursive character of this species of composition forbids the reader to look for any thing in the nature of compact and elaborate reasoning. Some of this writer’s suggestions respecting Christianity,—for those relating to Natural Religion do not belong to our subject,—are of that vague or otherwise undeterminable character, which admit of no argumentative reply. When, for instance, he insists that the time of “the resurrection of letters was a fatal period” for Christianity,\* and describes it as only suited to live in a time of ignorance and superstition, there is nothing for the believer to do but to express his opposite conviction, that advancing knowledge and civilization have brought and will bring it new support, and to appeal to future time for the confirmation of his better view. The main objections of a tangible description, which are found scattered, without method and in various forms of repetition, over these treatises, may, I think, be definitely stated as falling under the following heads.

1. That, the truths of natural religion being clear and sufficient, there was no need of any special divine interposition at the time when Christianity is said to have been revealed, and that accordingly

\* *On the Study and Use of History*, Letter V. (*Works*, Vol. II. p. 233. Edit. Philad.)

such a revelation at that time is incredible.\* This question I treated at large in my third Lecture, showing from ample historical testimonies that the contrary was the fact ; and it would be mere repetition now to return to that argument.

2. He has called in question the credibility of the Gospel records of the acts and discourses of Jesus ; denying that there is sufficient proof of the authenticity of those documents, or of their uncorrupt preservation to the present time.† But Lord Bolingbroke has left no proof of acquaintance with the well-established facts relating to this all-important point. It was treated at large in two former Lectures, and the remarks then made cover all the ground which he has opened.

3. Lord Bolingbroke finds objections to the credibility of Christianity in the limited extent to which it was originally promulgated, and in the partial effects which it has produced.‡ These objections had before been urged by Tindal, and have also already received our attention.§

4. He undertakes to account for the rapid early diffusion of Christianity, on the supposition of merely human agency.|| In this he was followed, with a very free use of his thoughts, but with additional materials of his own, by the historian Gibbon, whose views on this subject I formerly examined,

\* See particularly, *Fragments of Essays*, 23—28, 33, 34. (*Works*, Vol. IV. pp. 246. *et seq.* 283, *et seq.*)

† *Letter V.* (Vol. II. p. 231, *et seq.*) *Essay IV.* §§ 18, 19. (Vol. III. p. 468.)

‡ *Fragments of Essays*, §§ 33, 38. (Vol. IV. pp. 283, *et seq.* 307, *et seq.*)

§ See above, p. 154, *et seq.*

|| *Essay IV.* § 23. (Vol. III. p. 498, *et seq.*)

presenting then all that I conceive requires to be said concerning it.\*

But, among the points raised by Lord Bolingbroke, there are others, which have not hitherto fallen particularly under our notice, at least in the form which he has given to them.

5. He has objected to the contents of the New Testament. And his scattered objections under this head may be conveniently arranged under four specifications ; 1. that there are doctrines of the Gospel so unreasonable as to discredit its divine original ; 2. that its ethical system is imperfect and erroneous ; 3. that the sense of the scriptural records is in many instances uncertain ; 4. that the religion of Jesus, as taught by himself, is contradicted by it, as taught by Paul.

As to the first point, the alleged unreasonableness of doctrines of the Gospel, it is necessary to define precisely the position intended to be taken. The friends of Christianity must concede, and all intelligent defenders of it have conceded, that, could it be shown to contain any thing unequivocally opposed to, and irreconcilable with, man's reason or moral sense, that discovery would be fatal to its credit. It is a conviction of the preliminary fact, that it contains nothing of that kind, which makes it worth a reasonable man's while to proceed to an examination of the positive evidence in its favor ; which makes it, in short, provable to a reasonable man. It may also properly be admitted, that, if any system

\* See Vol. I. p. 248, *et seq.*

of doctrine is found to contain particulars, which to any mind appear, on speculative grounds, improbable, or highly improbable, that mind will reasonably approach the testimony offered in its behalf under a bias proportionably unfavorable. But, so much allowed, it will only amount to this ; — that the questions, which that mind will have to weigh, will be ; first, Is the doctrine, to which, on speculative grounds, I am averse, really contained in the system proposed for my acceptance ? and if so, then, secondly, Which is most likely, that I am in error as to my preconceived speculative opinion, or as to the force of that external evidence, which, if yielded to, will compel me to set that opinion aside ? It is but the common case of a conflict between opposite proofs. That is all. And it is a case, in the adjustment of which it may not improbably turn out, that the preconceived opinion had been adopted on light grounds ; in other words, that the doctrine which has occasioned a repugnance to the system embracing it, is not at all unreasonable, but the contrary.

Lord Bolingbroke attempts to sustain his charge against the Christian faith, as presenting a theory so manifestly unreasonable, as to refute its claim to credit, by referring to the doctrine of a satisfaction made to God by the death of Jesus for the sins of men, and to that of the retributions of the future life. As to the first, his language is, “ The fall of man, the foundation of the fundamental article of the Christian faith, is irreconcilable to every idea we can frame of the wisdom, justice, and goodness,

to say nothing of the dignity, of the Supreme Being;”\* and he represents it as contrary to our ideas of God’s moral attributes, “to believe that he sent his only begotten son, who had not offended him, to be sacrificed for men who had offended him, that he might expiate their sins, and satisfy his own anger.”† As I do not myself allow this doctrine, as described by Lord Bolingbroke, to be any part of Christianity, I have no occasion to defend its reasonableness, in order to protect Christianity from any unfavorable inference because of it. To me it seems unreasonable, as it did to him; but I do not find that Christianity is responsible for it. There are others, however, who think otherwise; and, for any person who should esteem it unreasonable, and who should also be satisfied of its being a doctrine of Christianity, the only question would be, whether it was so clearly and certainly unreasonable, as to overbalance and invalidate the positive proof adduced in support of that system of which it makes part. And the application of the same remark to the other doctrine, of future retribution,—also, I conceive, disingenuously stated by Lord Bolingbroke, particularly in respect to its being represented as having no reference to different degrees of good or ill desert,‡—is so obvious as not to require to be enlarged upon.

The second point of objection to the contents of the New Testament on the part of this author,

\* *Fragments of Essays*, § 36. (Works, Vol. IV. p. 301.)

† Ibid. § 37. (p. 304.)

‡ Ibid. § 68. (p. 442, *et seq.*)

which I have specified, is directed against its ethical system, as being imperfect and erroneous.

As to its being imperfect,\* it has been commonly allowed by unbelievers, and must be allowed by every fair observer, to possess the only desirable practical completeness, in supplying all actually existing defects in the natural law of conscience, particularly those which had been created in the course of time by perversions of custom and opinion; while, in respect to the rest, it has been said with unquestionable justness, that the proper design of a revelation was, “to supply motives, and not rules, sanctions and not precepts, the former being what mankind stood most in need of.”† Of Lord Bolingbroke’s argument against the correctness of the ethical system of Christianity, I need say no more, than that the instances on which he most relies are, its prohibitions of polygamy and of divorce, which in his opinion should have been left free.‡ It is however certain, that the doctrine of Christianity on these subjects, so far from reflecting discredit on its claims, is the same which, independently of its authority, has been approved by the best writers upon morals; and that those very Christian laws, by force of the authority, as Christian, with which they were pronounced, have been the effective means of raising one half of the human race to a condition of dignified usefulness and enjoyment;

\* *Essay*, IV. § 7. (Works, Vol. III. p. 406.)

† Paley, *View of the Evidences*, Part II. chap. 2.

‡ *Fragments of Essays*, § 18. (Works, Vol. IV. p. 222, *et seq.*)

of bringing every son and daughter of Christendom under the ineffably purifying and elevating influences of home ; and thus of changing the whole face of society within that range of civilization which is actually conterminous with Christendom.

The third point of objection, on Lord Bolingbroke's part, to the contents of the New Testament, is, that their sense is in many instances uncertain.\*

The objection, in this general statement, is exceedingly vague, and for that reason difficult to fasten upon, in a way to meet it with a definite reply. It affords opportunity to say little else than this, that it can by no means be shown to be of obscure or uncertain sense in regard to the main features of the system ; and that, as to that degree of uncertainty respecting the interpretation of its records, which may be alleged to be proved by the differences of opinion among its disciples, it only shares in this a universal condition of all the great subjects of human thought ; — a condition, too, undoubtedly attended with excellent effects, both in the way of sustaining an energetic action of the mind of believers upon it, and in the way of its moral influence.

But this train of thought, also, I had before occasion to follow out in remarking upon the work of Tindal,† who had urged the same objection ; and I should not again have adverted to it, even in these few words, except to say, that, — however vague the objection in a general statement, — in that form, in

\* *On the Study and Use of History*, Letter V. (Vol. II. p. 232.) *Essay IV. § 17, et seq.* (Vol. III. p. 464.)

† See above, p. 161.

which Lord Bolingbroke has most expressly presented it, it becomes quite definite and manageable. He has taken the bold step of instituting an unfavorable comparison of revealed religion with natural, in respect to the clearness of its teachings. His language is, “The first principles of natural religion are so simple and plain, that casuistry has no apparent pretence to meddle with them; . . . . these principles want neither paraphrase nor commentary to be sufficiently understood, whereas the very first principles of the Christian religion . . . . are so veiled in mystery of language, that without a comment or with one, they give us no clear and distinct ideas.”\* What ambiguity was intended to lurk here in the expression “the first principles of natural religion,” rendering it possible to defend the assertion of their clearness, one could not safely undertake to say. But as to any thing like *a system* of natural religion,— which is the only thing that could be spoken of, with pertinency to this argument,— either all the history of ancient opinion is false, or else natural religion, so far from possessing a clearness such as justifies a favorable comparison of it, in that respect, with revealed, has been a subject the most fruitful in an endless diversity of opinion, and pertinacity of debate.

The fourth particular of objection by this writer to the contents of the New Testament is found in the alleged inconsistency† between the doctrine of Jesus

\* *Fragments of Essays*, § 8. (Works, Vol. IV. p. 173.)

† *Essay*, IV. § 9. (Works, Vol. III. p. 420.)

and that of Paul. What is material to this argument is, of course, to show the actual existence of such an inconsistency. Could its existence be substantiated, the objection would be valid, at least against the doctrine of Paul, and, under certain supposable conditions, against the doctrine of Jesus also. But the burden of proof is evidently on him who alleges such an inconsistency to exist; and the proof would of necessity consist in a course of exegetical argument upon the discourses of Jesus, and the epistles of Paul, such as would fix an interpretation upon the one irreconcilable with the sense of the other. But Lord Bolingbroke, with all his great accomplishments, had no scholarship of the kind necessary for pursuing that argument; an argument which needs to be made out, if at all, by learned investigation, for the common reader certainly will not admit its force. Had he possessed and used such learning, it is likely he would have ended, as others have done who have possessed and used it, in discovering that the argument could not be maintained.

6. Once more; a leading topic of objection, on this writer's part, to Christianity, is furnished in a course of animadversions on the system and scriptures of the Jewish faith, which Christianity so recognises and adopts as to make itself responsible for them in some sense and degree. He labors this point with such fulness as renders it probable that it was this which first and chiefly affected his own mind. He denies the authenticity and integrity of the Old

Testament scriptures, and charges them with containing scarcely any thing that is not repugnant to the wisdom, power, and other attributes of a Supreme, All-perfect Being.\* Here is undoubtedly the strong point of his reasoning; strong, not because of any essential cogency, but because, the real connexion of the New Testament with the Old being perhaps not even to the present day properly understood by Christians, he had an advantage in the vague conceptions of those whom he addressed.

That subject has relations altogether too important to be discussed at the end of a lecture, nor does Lord Bolingbroke present it with the same definiteness as other writers; for instance, Voltaire and Paine. I reserve it accordingly for future consideration, when I shall come presently to speak of their writings; and I will say no more of the contents of those of Lord Bolingbroke, except that he expressly disclaims for himself any reliance upon some objections, which before or since his day have been urged by certain other infidel writers. He condemns, for instance, the notion “that miracles are not to be admitted as proofs of a divine original,” and says, “We know now that real miracles can be operated by no power but that of God, nor for any purpose, by consequence, but such as infinite wisdom and truth direct and sanctify.”† He does not

\* E. g. *On the Study and Use of History*. Letter III. chap. 2. (Works, Vol. II. p. 200.) *Fragments of Essays*, § 71. (Vol. IV. p. 456.) § 76. (Ibid. p. 473.)

† *Essay IV. § 2.* (Works, Vol. III. p. 359.)

pretend, with Tindal, that the positive institutions of Christianity present an objection to its credit as of a divine original, but on the contrary he declares, concerning the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper, that “they were not only innocent but profitable ceremonies, because they were extremely proper to keep up the spirit of true natural religion, by keeping up that of Christianity, and to promote the observation of moral duties, by maintaining a respect for the revelation which confirmed them.”\* And, as to the beneficial influence of this faith, he says that “no religion ever appeared in the world, whose natural tendency was so much directed to promote the peace and happiness of mankind.”†

I am sensible that, in the account now attempted of the writings of Lord Shaftesbury and Lord Bolingbroke, little has been offered in the way of direct argument in defence of our religion; but it was impossible to pass over two writers of such distinction, even though, in describing the contents of their works, it appeared, as to a considerable portion, to be the fittest course, merely to refer to a past or future treatment of the same argument, in a different connexion, in this series of Lectures. The truth is, unless I err, that, great as were the abilities of both, there is no single argument stated by either, which has not been more effectively urged in some other quarter. They partly repeated views which had been more fully presented before, and

\* *Essay IV. § 7. (Vol. III. p. 410.)*

† *Ibid. § 5. (p. 396.)*

partly they furnished hints which were afterwards more fully followed out, with the help of a learning which they had not to apply. Their writings suggest to the considerate reader the reflection, how much effect may unhappily be produced by a confident pretension of reasoning, with little of that honest and cautious production of appreciable evidence, which alone has a right to influence a reasonable mind ; or even by the mere off-hand suggestion of uncertainties, concerning which the writer himself has not been at the pains to learn whether to himself they would not cease to be uncertainties, on being subjected to a proper investigation.

Of the different classes of minds indisposed to Christianity, one is that which may be called by the name of the *philosophical wits*. This class, to which Gibbon belonged, and of which Shaftesbury and Bolingbroke are perhaps the most eminent examples, are accustomed to enjoy their leisure, and parade their resources, in sporting with, and exercising their ingenuity upon, whatever grave subject of common concern any accident may cause them to select, whether of morals, politics, or religion,— but particularly the latter, because a free treatment of it is on the whole the easiest way to produce a sensation in the common mind ; though perhaps the paradoxes of Mandeville and Godwin respecting politics and morals excited, in their day, as much admiration in some quarters as those of Bolingbroke respecting the Christian faith. Such opponents create an impression adverse to our reli-

gion, not so much by what they argue or develope, as by what they hint. Were their hint reduced to the form of an argument, it would often be seen to be divested of its piquancy and force in the process. Their very distrust, however rash, ill-considered, and baseless, is apt to be itself taken for an argument. The reasoning of their blind admirers is, that an opinion approved by such superior intellects, especially when independently adopted in opposition to prevailing sentiment, may be presumed to be entertained for valid cause. And what is true on a large scale of the anti-religious influence of brilliant writers, who indulge themselves in such a style of thought, every one may have observed to be frequently true, within a more limited sphere, of men whose reputation in a neighbourhood, as statesmen, for instance, as scholars, as persons of genius and wit, commands for them a deferential hearing, to which they are no wise entitled when they dogmatize with equal confidence and feebleness on the subject of religion; a subject which they have not studied, and therefore one, upon which, with all their gifts, the judgment of a common mind, which has been at the pains to possess itself of the facts and to observe their bearings, is of incomparably more account than theirs.

I am in my next Lecture to speak of a writer of an entirely different class, who has relied on one point, and urged it with learned illustration

and logical skill; namely, Anthony Collins, author of the “Discourse of the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion,” a work which was brought anew to notice among ourselves thirty years ago, by reason of the large use made of it in the publication of our countryman, Mr. English.

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## LECTURE XVIII.

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### OBJECTIONS OF ANTHONY COLLINS.

THE writer, whose argument I am to treat this evening, revived and amplified an objection, which I formerly mentioned as having been urged by some of the ancient opponents of the faith.\* Anthony Collins was bred to the law; but, being independent in his circumstances, indulged his tastes in devoting himself to literary and philanthropic pursuits. A pupil and friend of Locke, he did not develope his infidel tendencies till long after the death of that excellent philosopher. He was a man of estimable qualities, and a well-furnished and skilful disputant; nor is there much to find fault with in the manner of his controversial works, except that half-pretence of attachment to Christianity,—not intended to deceive (for the veil was purposely made too thin) but still undignified and unbecoming,—which was

\* See above, pp. 15, 52, 94.

a poor fashion of the infidel writers of his time. Among his works was “A Vindication of the Divine Attributes,” and “A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty,” which was answered by Dr. Samuel Clarke. In 1713, he published his “Discourse of Free Thinking,” a defence of freedom of speculation upon religious subjects. In its tone and style of illustration, this work indicated sufficiently, the purpose for which the writer meant to use the freedom which he rightfully vindicated; and particularly it laid stress, to the intended prejudice of the Christian Scriptures, on those verbal differences of the different copies, then recently brought to light by Dr. Mill, which, on their first discovery, were thought to throw a degree of uncertainty on the records, but which, as I formerly took occasion to show, had, on further observation, contributed so admirably to the opposite result.\*

But the argument, which has made Collins conspicuous among the assailants of the faith, is contained in his work, published in 1724, entitled “A Discourse on the Grounds and Reasons of the Christian Religion,” and in another, published three years afterwards, in reply to the assailants of this, and in particular to Bishop Chandler, entitled “The Scheme of Literal Prophecy considered.”

The argument of these books, briefly stated, was as follows, and it was learnedly and ably, though of

\* See Vol. I. p. 167.

course, not being persuaded by it, I conceive, not cogently, urged.

Jesus of Nazareth asserted for himself, and his disciples asserted for him, that he was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament. If he was not that, his claim being such, he was not a supernatural divine messenger in any sense. And how did they undertake to prove that the character of Jewish Messiah belonged to him? The evidence, to which they appealed, was that of descriptions of the Messiah in the Old Testament. They produced portions of the ancient prophecies, and said, There is the prediction, and here is the fulfilment. That which was foretold, has now come to pass. The correspondence between the anciently written word and the now existing reality is so complete, as to prove the supernatural character of the event. Had the correspondence been so complete, says Collins, the evidence would have been as satisfactory as it was alleged to be. But in fact it was not so; and, not being so, it leaves the whole argument inconclusive.

Nor does it merely invalidate that argument, but it at the same time precludes every other; because on that specifically, and on no other, the claim of Christianity was rested. St. Matthew, for instance, in connexion with his account of the circumstances of the birth of Jesus, said, that "all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, 'A virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call

his name Immanuel.’’ Matthew intended to say that Jesus was to be received as God’s Immanuel, because of the circumstances of his birth being the same as it had been declared that they would be, by the prophet Isaiah, six hundred years before. But, in fact Isaiah did not speak of Jesus at all, but of an infant born in the reign of his own contemporary Ahaz. Again ; Matthew spoke of the residence of Jesus with his parents in Egypt, as being a fulfilment of the declaration of Hosea concerning what should befall him, when he represents God as saying, “Out of Egypt have I called my son.” But in fact, Hosea did not use those words as a prediction concerning Jesus, or as a prediction of any kind. He was referring not to a foreseen fact of eight centuries after his time, but to an historical fact of six centuries before it, the emigration of the Jews from Egypt under Moses ; “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt.”

This is no evidence for Christianity ; and yet it is such evidence as its (so-called) inspired champions produce. If they were what they professed to be, supernaturally empowered teachers of a supernaturally revealed religion, they knew what was the proper evidence on which to assert its claim. But, in fact, what they have produced is worthless, and shows them to have been in error ; and not only therefore can we not in reason yield to the evidence they have offered, but, since their very offer of it so convicts them, we are also pre-

cluded from attending to any other, whether of miracles or any thing else.

Such is a summary of the argument, with sufficient illustration, I trust, to render it intelligible. Of the defences made against it, I will mention, first, a very peculiar one set up by one of the most accomplished and excellent of Collin's contemporaries. William Whiston, the associate, and afterwards the successor, of Sir Isaac Newton as mathematical professor at Cambridge, and as learned in divinity as in exact science, replied to Collins in his treatises entitled "The Literal Accomplishment of the Scripture Prophecies," and, "A Supplement to the Literal Accomplishment of the Scripture Prophecies." He assented to both assertions of Collins; namely, first, that the New Testament writers had applied the prophetical passages of the Old Testament in question, to the proof of Christianity; while, secondly, in point of fact, those passages, as they now stand, are inapplicable. But he assumed the singular position, that the Old Testament had, in those passages, been corrupted by the Jews since the Apostles' times, for the very purpose of invalidating their argument; that, as those passages originally stood in the Hebrew Bible, and as they stood at the period when the Apostles quoted them, they were exact descriptions of Jesus, his religion, and his times, and received in him their literal fulfilment; and that it was only by the perfidious labor of the Jews, in the second century, in vitiating the records,

that this correspondence has been made to vanish. And in an “Essay towards Restoring the True texts of the Old Testament,” he proceeded to employ much learned labor on the recovery of the original readings, so as to cause the lost correspondence to re-appear.

This was but the bold error of an able and thoroughly sincere man, at a period when the studies concerned with the literary history of the Bible had been but little cultivated. Had Whiston lived somewhat later, he would have seen, that, to name no other improbabilities in the supposition of the accomplishment of such an extraordinary plot (of whose existence, too, of course there is no historical evidence), it is inconsistent with what is known of the circulation of the Old Testament, both in the original and in the Greek translation, among the early Christians; and inconsistent too with the unquestionable facts of the case, as they appear in quotations from the Jewish Scriptures in works of the long line of Christian fathers. But there is no reason why my audience should be detained with a discussion of the system of Whiston, which chiefly attracted attention at first as an ingenious and erudite paradox, and has long since sunk out of notice. Its chief effect was, the unhappy one of giving the appearance of a triumph to his more wary opponent. It was natural that Christianity should be exposed to suspicion, when one of its eminent champions felt compelled, in its defence, to have recourse to such wild and unsustained conjecture.

The reasoning of Collins then, I repeat, was to this effect ; The first preachers of Christianity urged in its behalf certain arguments drawn from parts of the Old Testament, which arguments, on turning to the Old Testament, are seen to be groundless ; the religion, therefore, is undeserving of credit. And Whiston replied to him, by saying, they did indeed use such arguments, and arguments which would have been unsatisfactory and indefensible, had the Old Testament, in respect to the passages referred to, been the same in their day as it is in ours. But such was not the case. It has been corrupted since ; and, upon the basis on which their arguments were made, those arguments were good and cogent. Other opponents of Collins, among whom Chandler, Bishop of Coventry and Litchfield, was conspicuous, took different ground. It was substantially the same, which, with different modifications by different writers, has been commonly maintained to our day, and among others by Mr. Edward Everett in his “*Defence of Christianity,*” and by the authors of other strictures upon the work of Mr. George English, entitled, “*The Grounds of Christianity examined by comparing the New Testament with the Old.*”

These writers, while, some to a greater, some to a less extent, they have been inclined to regard specified quotations in the New Testament from the Old, as having been introduced in the way of mere rhetorical accommodation, and not in the way of proof, have, as to the more important passages,

agreed with Collins, that they were used by the New Testament writers for proof, as well as (in opposition to Whiston) that their original reading, and the reading possessed by the New Testament writers was the same as that which the text of the Old Testament now exhibits to our view. But they have asserted, contrary to Collins, that the proof thus adduced was good proof; and their argument to this effect has, of course, consisted in a criticism upon the several passages, designed to show that their real, original sense was the same in which the New Testament writers understood and applied them.

This they have aimed to show, some in one way of interpretation, some in another. Some have held that those Old Testament passages, understood to be appealed to in the New Testament as supernatural predictions of Jesus, really had, in the original design of their authors, that sense, and that sense alone, notwithstanding the contrary appearance presented by the contexts in which they severally stand. This opinion may be considered the prevailing one among this class of expositors at the present day, and reckons among its defenders in this country, our learned neighbour, Professor Stuart of Andover. Others have experienced greater difficulty in ascribing this meaning to the passages in question, as their primitive purport; and have accordingly resorted to the theory of what is called a *double sense*, which has had the patronage of distinguished names, ever since the question

has been moved, and has, on the whole, been decidedly the favorite scheme. That is to say ; a critic reads the passage, in which Isaiah represents himself as having said to Ahaz, “A virgin shall become a mother,”\* and so on, and understands it as relating to the birth of a child within the period of that monarch’s reign. But, turning to Matthew’s Gospel,† he understands that evangelist to declare the allusion to have been to the birth of Jesus, several centuries afterwards. Accordingly, adopting both interpretations, and not understanding either to be set aside by the other, he reconciles them by means of the hypothesis, that Isaiah, in the primary sense of his words, referred to an event of the time of Ahaz ; but that, in a secondary sense, he designed them to foreshadow the more important event of a distant future time. This is the theory of *double senses* in prophecy. I shall revert to it, after briefly stating another.

Collins said, The early teachers of Christianity produced futile arguments in its defence, and accordingly they propagated, and have bequeathed it to us, destitute of any good defence. Whiston replied, No ; those arguments would have been futile if they were what they now appear to us ; but they only appear so, because the Old Testament documents, which furnished their basis, have since that time been falsified. Bishop Chandler and others, said, No ; the arguments, as they stand, are good

\* *Is.* vii. 14.

† *Mat.* i. 22, 23.

ones ; the prophecies referred to originally meant, in a primary, or else in a secondary sense, what the New Testament writers understood them to mean, when they produced them as proof. A different view, still, has recently been taken, and has the support of Christian scholars of our own vicinity, whose authority on such a question may be safely said to claim as much deference as that of any living writers ; particularly it has been maintained by the learned translator of the poetical books of the Old Testament, now Professor of Biblical Literature in our University.

Their account of the facts, is this ; The New Testament writers did sometimes interpret the Old Testament erroneously. For instance, Matthew did suppose the words addressed by Isaiah to Ahaz, to constitute a prophecy pointing to, and fulfilled in, Jesus of Nazareth. And he was in an error in that supposition. The words really had no such meaning. But what then ? Nothing follows, except the conclusion that Matthew was not an infallible interpreter of Old Testament scripture. But this in no degree affects the validity of his testimony to other facts, which assure us that Jesus was "a teacher sent from God, because no man could do such works as he did, except God were with him." Matthew could testify to facts, of which his senses took cognizance, without being an infallible interpreter of language ; and those facts are all that we want to know, in order to be satisfied of the divine authority

of his master. No one supposes, that, because the apostles were inspired, they were omniscient; and instances of their imperfect knowledge, both before and after their master's departure, have been placed on record by themselves. We regard their occasional erroneous interpretations of the Old Testament, as constituting one instance of their partial knowledge; and if, in the case in question, they honestly produced as evidence something which in reality was not such, this does not weaken, for those whom they addressed, the force of other evidence, in respect to the reality of which it was not in the nature of things possible that they should be liable to any mistake.

While I look at this last theory with all the respect due to the eminent quarters whence it derives support, I am compelled to say that it does not satisfy my mind. Persuaded, with other Christians, that the apostles, after their master's departure, were supernaturally endowed with all the knowledge concerning his religion, necessary to qualify them for their work of spreading it, I cannot but regard it as in a high degree improbable, that they were left in error upon so important a point, as that of the nature of the evidence, on which it belonged to them to urge its claims. Unquestionably, with the well-authenticated miraculous history of Christianity on the one side, and nothing on the other, but this fact,—if it were a fact,—of an erroneous opinion concerning one feature of its evidence on the part of its primitive

teachers, I could not, as a reasonable man, but yield credence to its claim of divinity, and own that the difficulty was so far disposed of, by the considerations just produced, as to have no right to stand in the way of a satisfied belief on the main question.\* But, before I resort to this expedient, which I cannot regard with favorable presumptions, I would fain know whether any such expedient is called for. Is there any certain instance of a writer

\* That is, I should regard this instance, if I saw it to exist, of misapprehension on the part of the apostles, in the same light in which Grotius and others have viewed their supposed erroneous expectation of a speedy personal re-appearance of Christ, and catastrophe of human things. If they entertained that expectation, of course they were in error; an error, however, which, in my opinion, could not be affirmed to invalidate their claim to a divine commission. But I cannot allow that there is proof of their having entertained the expectation. When Paul says, for instance, (*1 Thess. iv. 17*) "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air," I understand him to be employing the very common form of language, by which one belonging to any community of persons, civil, religious, or the like, identifies himself with it in the use of the pronoun of the first person, while he speaks of things done, or to be done, by that community, or some portion of it, though, individually, he had, or is to have, no share in doing them. Thus we North Americans of the present time may say, *We* drove out the Indians, and took possession of their country, or *We* shall be a numerous people, a century hence. For scriptural examples of this use, see *Judges* ii. 1; *Psalm* lxvi. 6; *Hosea* xii. 4. And for proof that Paul did not, in point of fact, labor under the mistake attributed to him, see *2 Cor.* iv. 14, v. 6, 8; *Phil.* i. 22; iii. 10, 11; *2 Tim.* iv. 6. The text, *Phil.* iv. 5, 6, is nothing to the purpose. The connexion is, "The Lord is at hand;"—a watchful providence is always near; therefore, "be anxious about nothing," &c.

The common admission, by scriptural expositors, of mistake, in this instance, on the part of the writers of the New Testament, is, in my view, altogether uncalled for by the facts of the case. Dr. Paley (*View of the Evidences of Christianity*, Part III. chap. 2,) gives, in a few words, a good vindication of the supposed fact. But I cannot allow that it admits of being reasoned from, since I cannot allow it to be a fact. And so, precisely, I view the question treated above.

of the New Testament having referred to a passage in the Old, as containing evidence in the way of supernatural prediction, when it does not appear in fact to bear that character?

If the criticisms upon such passages, of the prevailing school of Christian expositors, are correct, then there is no such instance. The New Testament writers, when they have used such language as, "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet," and so on, have intended to produce such an argument; but they have in every instance reasoned legitimately, from a correct apprehension of the fact, and with just inference in its application.

I will not say that such critics have not succeeded in their aim. Whoever thinks they have done so, will of course consider the objection to Christianity, which we are now considering, perfectly disposed of. But for myself, I must own that they have not succeeded to my satisfaction. In respect to the texts which have occasioned this discussion, the expositions of those interpreters who have labored to fix on them, as the single original sense, that sense in which they are understood to be produced as proof by the writers of the New Testament, appear to me to be extremely violent; while the theory of a double sense, less esteemed now than formerly in any quarter, appears to me to be justly liable to the charge of violating all the principles of language, and of being in fact the theory of no definite sense whatever. In my view, the true solution

of the question is different from any of those I have described.

I conceive that the opponents of Collins erred, in contradicting the latter assertion, of which his argument is composed, when they should have contradicted the former. He asserted, first, that the New Testament writers had undertaken to prove the divinity of their religion by references to passages of the Old Testament which he specified, and which he asserted, secondly, to be unsuitable to that use. His opponents assented to the former statement, and denied the latter. They maintained that those passages were suitable to that use. They should have owned, I think, that they were not suitable to that use, and should have denied, that, in point of fact, they had been applied to it. This I take to be the true state of the case. The difficulty, made so much of, I hold to be merely an imaginary one. The passages which the evangelists are blamed on the one hand, and defended on the other, for having used as arguments, if I read them correctly, they did not use as arguments at all.

To explain the case, as I understand it, a few preliminary observations are necessary. It is an approved and familiar rhetorical device, to enrich a composition with applications, more or less formal, of language of some admired author. It gives a vivacity to style; at all events, it is a natural impulse, as every one knows, of the mind which, while it composes, remembers some form of words, applicable really or fancifully to the subject in hand.

One of the editors of Homer asserts, that there is scarcely a line of that poet, which has not been thus repeated in a quotation by some ancient.\*

If the Jews were not exempt, when they wrote, from this law of the mind, (as who can tell why they should be?) from what book should they quote? From what book but the Old Testament? The Old Testament was their national library. It contained their national literature; and it was more to them than Homer was to the Greeks, for it contained their national religion too. Its language was so familiar to their memories, that it would perpetually present itself unbidden, as often as any thing occurred which it would fitly describe; and it was not only, for their readers, an always ready, but a dignified, a sacred, storehouse of agreeable and exciting allusions. How natural to adorn a narrative or description by the remark, This resembles what we read of in such or such a place in Old Testament history; or, This might be well described by the language used on a different occasion by this or that ancient prophet.

But it will be said, The form of expression, introducing a quotation in the passages which occasion this inquiry, is very strong; so strong, as not to seem suitable to precede a mere ornament of speech. As I wish to give this argument its fullest force, I will treat it in reference to the strongest form of language which is any where used. “All this was

\* Daniel Heinsius. See Michaelis, *Introduction to the New Testament*. Part I. chap. 5. § 1. (Vol. I. p. 202.)

done," says Matthew, in relation to the circumstances of the Saviour's birth, "that it might be fulfilled," and so on.

The first question here of course would arise on the sense of the word *fulfil*. Does it necessarily intimate the accomplishment of a supernatural prediction, so as to show, that, agreeably to what is commonly supposed, it was this which Matthew had in view? I answer, By no means; and, if I were at liberty here to use that kind of argument, I should proceed to show that it does not, by observations on the meaning and comprehensiveness of the Greek word here translated *fulfil*. In such connexions it simply means, to *verify*, to *make good*; as we say, "In such an occurrence the saying was made good," not intending to declare that the saying foretold the occurrence, but simply conveying the same sense in a different phraseology, as is expressed, where persons are spoken of, in whom was fulfilled the old proverb, that the swine, when washed, have returned to their wallowing in the mire.\* It certainly was not intended there to say that the proverb, thus fulfilled in those persons, had been originally constructed as a supernatural prediction of their backsliding.

But, "All this was done, *that* it might be fulfilled;" must not this word *that*, and the whole construction of the sentence, be understood to declare, that the event was brought about on set purpose, that so it should answer to the prophetically

\* 2 Peter, ii. 22.

uttered words? I will not, in reply to this question, lead my audience through any philological technics, relating to the distinction between “the causative *that*,” and “the eventual *that*,” but ask them to try it by a few simple examples.\* If, in mourning for my ship-wrecked friend, I say, “He only went upon the sea to perish,” or, “He trusted to the ocean only *that* it might overwhelm him,” would any one so slavishly interpret the words as to understand me to mean that such was his purpose in going on the sea; or not rather as expressing, in an animated manner, that such had been the sad event?

Or, to take scriptural examples, — for these are equally at hand, and might be produced in an indefinite number, — “Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight, *that* thou mightest be justified when thou speakest;” † does any reader understand the Psalmist as saying that he sinned for the purpose of justifying God, or simply that such was the result of his sin? “They prophesy a lie in my name, that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish;” ‡ does this mean, that the false prophets had thus offended for the very end of causing the expulsion of their nation, and their own with the rest? “Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he might be born blind?” § (as the literal translation is); was the question intended to be asked, whether the unnatural parents

\* The subject is constantly treated in the philological works. See, for instance, Glass, *Philologia Sacra*, Lib. iii. tract 7. canon 19.

† *Psalm*, li. 4.      ‡ *Jeremiah*, xxvii. 10.      § *John*, ix. 2.

had sinned with a view to bringing this calamity on their unborn son?

Again; such forms of reference to their ancient scriptures were, in point of fact, undoubtedly in use among the Jews, when they intended to intimate nothing of the nature of accomplishment of supernatural prediction. The Talmuds, collections of their ancient comments, which I had formerly occasion to describe,\* trifling and absurd as are most of their contents, and utterly worthless in themselves considered, are our best storehouse of materials for acquaintance with ancient Jewish forms of speech, and often throw important light upon New Testament phraseology; for which purpose collections have been made from them by Lightfoot and Schöttgen, and other Christian scholars. As to the purport of such phraseology as that now before us, we read, for example, as follows, in a passage discussing the question how a person who had been guilty of a ritual omission ought to make up his fault. “Rabbi Eliezer said, ‘He who does not eat on the night of the first day of the feast, must do it on the night of the last day.’ But the wise men say that there is no compensation for the thing. *Of [or, concerning] this it is said,* ‘That which is crooked cannot be made strait, nor that which is wanting be numbered.’”† Here a quotation from the book of Ecclesiastes ‡ is presented as applicable to the case in hand. But cer-

\* See Vol. I. p. 313.

† *Mischna Surenhusii*, Tom. II. p. 266.

‡ *Eccles.* i. 15.

tainly the Jewish casuist did not mean to affirm, that the words he cites were originally written as a solution of the question which he was now discussing.

To quote further from the same collection ; “What shall I do with thee,” said Simeon, “who dost delight thyself before the face of God ? . . . . Thou art like a son that delights himself before his father ; . . . . *of [concerning] thee* the Scripture saith, ‘Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice.’”\* The words here quoted with the introduction, *of thee the Scripture saith*, are from the book of Proverbs,† where no one will pretend that the insignificant person addressed in this Talmudical passage was originally had in view, or that he was supposed to have been originally had in view, by the person who many centuries after applied it to him. Again ; “When Rabbi Abun came in before the King, he turned his neck. They came, seeking to kill him ; but they saw two sparks of fire streaming from his neck, and let him go, *to fulfil that which is said*,‡ ‘All people of the earth shall see that thou art called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of thee.’”§ We have nothing to do with the fable ; but who will attribute to its author such an imagination, as that the scriptural words, which he represents as being fulfilled in the event related by him, were originally written with reference to that event ? Such instances

\* *Mischna Surenhus*, Tom. II. p. 375.

† *Prov. xxiii. 25.*

‡ *Deut. xxviii. 10.*

§ *Talmud Hierosolymitan. Berachoth*, cap. 4, as quoted by Schaaf, *Opus Aramaeum, Selecta Dialecti Talmud.* pp. 372, 373.

prove a Jewish use of speech, similar to that which is the subject of our present inquiry. But, if such was an authorized Jewish phraseology in the sense explained, then it was one to which the New Testament writers, as Jews, were accustomed. Certainly their forms of language are to be interpreted agreeably to the established usages of their own nation.

Were there opportunity to pursue the argument, abundant illustration might be presented of the view which I take of the main question. If that view is correct, the New Testament writers will be seen to be in no degree liable to the charge which has been brought against them, of misconceptions of the sense of the Old, in such quotations as I have particularly dwelt upon. Matthew then is to be understood, after relating the circumstances of his Master's nativity, to have remarked, as was very natural for him to do, that the event fulfilled,—that is, *filled out, conformed to*,—the tenor of those well-known glowing words of the ancient prophet, when he was promising to his afflicted sovereign a speedy temporal deliverance for his nation.\* So when the same evangelist refers to the words of the prophet Hosea, where he says, “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and I called my son out of Egypt,”† and applies them to the return of Jesus from that country, in the remark, that “this fulfilled what was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I have called my son ;’”‡ and again, when, having related that Jesus addressed

\* *Mat. i. 22, 23.*

† *Hos. xi. 1.*

‡ *Mat. i. 15.*

the multitude in parables, he adds, that this was done, “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, ‘I will open my mouth in parables,’ ”\*—words which it seems impossible to doubt that the Psalmist used concerning himself, † or to suppose that St. Matthew understood him to use in any other sense; — on these, and other like occasions, we shall understand this evangelist and his associates not to have had in view the assertion of a supernatural prediction fulfilled, but merely the passing suggestion of analogies between an event, which they were recording, and another which the language used in describing it brought to their minds.

The method of explanation, which I have now been developing, is called by the name of *the accommodation scheme*; and my own view differs from that of others, who have adopted it, only in giving it a wider application. The remarks which have now been made answer to a large class of texts; and, having particularly illustrated them in reference to one text which is oftenest specified in this connexion, I will do the same as to another, of equal interest, which may perhaps be called the most prominent instance of those, in which the stress does not lie on the use of that particular form of quotation which has now been expounded.

On the day of the first Pentecost after their Lord’s ascension, the Apostles were qualified for their work by being empowered to address the strangers

\* *Mat.* xiii. 35.

† *Psalm*, lxxviii. 2.

at Jerusalem in the languages of their respective countries. In reply to the astonishment of some of the bystanders, and the mockery of others, at this amazing phenomenon, Peter is related to have stood up with the eleven, and addressed the multitude in such a manner, that “numbers gladly received his word and were baptized, and the same day there were added unto the disciples’ company about three thousand souls.”\* The truth to which these thousands were converted, was that which he announced in saying, “Let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.”† How did they become satisfied of the truth of that declaration? How did Peter seek and succeed to persuade them, on this first essay to fulfil the Master’s parting command to “go and teach all nations?”

He persuaded them, some will answer, by the force of certain prophecies which he produced in that discourse; one at some length from Joel, and two from the Psalms. But, the opponent will say, If the first great company of converts were persuaded by that evidence, they were persuaded by evidence which was altogether insufficient; and, if this was what Peter had to maintain his claim with, his claim ought not to have been acknowledged by reasonable men. For, if ancient prediction fulfilled is to be owned for satisfactory proof, it must clearly be because the correspondence between the predic-

\* *Acts*, ii. 41.

† *Ibid.* ii. 36.

tion and its accomplishment is so manifestly circumstantial and exact, as to forbid any other explanation except that of a supernatural divine interference. But how was it in the present instance? Look at the words of Joel, which composed Peter's first and longest quotation in this discourse. What was their tenor?

The language is, “‘It shall come to pass in the last days,’ saith God, ‘I will pour out of my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my spirit, and they shall prophesy; and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.’”\* This was the prediction, if any, which was first brought to the notice of the multitude, to satisfy them of the character of him whom Peter declared to be a man sent and approved of God. But where was that manifestly circumstantial and exact accomplishment of the prediction, which was to convert it into present proof of a supernatural divine interposition? Why could not those addressed have replied, “We see no such accomplishment. We see no sun turned into darkness, nor moon into blood. We see no wonders in heaven above, no blood, nor fire,

\* *Joel*, ii. 28—32; *Acts*, ii. 16—21.

nor vapor of smoke ; and though young men may have seen visions, and old men have dreamed dreams, as these are facts not apparent to us, they cannot be taken by us as the basis of any further conviction."

I see not how, upon that understanding of the passage which I suppose is common, a sufficient answer could be made to an objection of this kind. But I take it to be only through a misinterpretation of Peter's words, that the validity of his reasoning is subjected to so serious a question. As I understand him, he does not rest the claims of his Master's religion on the evidence of a prediction, of so vague a character, fulfilled,—a prediction, which, however real, was certainly not suited, in its detail of circumstances, to the present purpose, that of conciliating unbelief ; but he rests its claims on the proper evidence of the miraculous works wrought in its behalf. He introduces the subject, it is true, by saying, not simply, " We are not beside ourselves, as you injuriously charge us with being ; we are heralds of the Messiah's times ; the long expected Christ is come." He does not introduce the grand annunciation, which he was presently to prove, in such simple terms ; but, in a style more suitable to the sublime excitement of the occasion, he says, " That which you see is not what you suppose it, the officious frenzy of intemperate men ; but the time has come at length, which all the fathers looked for with so confident and intense a longing ; the time which Joel described, with the lavish rich-

ness of poetical imagery, due to the enthusiasm with which the great subject filled his soul."

This was Peter's natural and becoming form of annunciation of the truth, that Jesus of Nazareth was the long expected Messiah. But, when he presently proceeded to the proof of the truth so announced, he then spoke in a different strain. Then he appealed to the miracles of Jesus, and particularly to that great and last miracle of the resurrection, which his followers, who had had ocular evidence of it, were now addressing themselves to publish to the world. "Ye men of Israel," he says, "hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by *miracles and wonders and signs*, which God did by him in the midst of you, *as ye yourselves also know*, him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain, whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death." "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses."\* In the miracles done by God through Jesus in the midst of them, as they, or part of them, also knew, though, in their tardy hesitating sluggishness of soul, they had not yielded to the conviction which that sublime testimonial carried with it, and, among those miracles, in the resurrection of Jesus, to which his servants were now about to publish their effective testimony through the world,—in these, and in the present miracle of their own capacity, with-

\* *Acts*, ii. 22—24, 32.

out human teaching, to speak to foreigners each in his native tongue,—in *these miracles*, thus presented (and enlarged upon, it is likely, as to their evidence and purport, in the “many other words” with which Peter is further said to have “testified and exhorted,”) consisted the proof with which three thousand souls were won to the faith on the memorable day of the first Pentecost.

I could not, I think, have selected from the whole New Testament any other texts more directly bearing upon the argument of this evening’s Lecture, than the two which I have brought before your notice for the particular illustration of principles of interpretation, applicable equally to others. The question naturally occurs at the close of the inquiry, How are we then to regard the not unfrequent references in the New Testament to the Old, in connexion with the subject of the advent and religion of Jesus Christ? Had the question been put to me, some years ago, after I had resorted to the common sources of information concerning it, I could not have given a reply satisfactory to my own mind; and that I could not, was an occasion to me of inexpressible concern. Different minds view the various points in the evidences differently; mine, since I first gave much attention to the subject, has never labored seriously upon any other point, than that of this connexion between the Old Testament and the New. As I speak only for myself, I may say, without a breach of modesty, that investigations, patiently pursued, and, I would hope, fairly,

and with a sincere desire to know the truth, conducted me to results which have afforded me not only relief, but the fullest satisfaction. The method, and part of the details, of these have been laid before the public in two volumes, part of a work on the “Jewish Scriptures and Antiquities.” The minute criticism, necessary to exhaust the subject, does not admit of being introduced as part of such a course of Lectures as the present; but I will state results, bearing upon the particular point of our present inquiry, though conscious, that, unaccompanied as they must be with the proper explanations and defence, they may at first strike many minds as untenable.

I am satisfied, then, that no instance can be established of misrepresentation or misapprehension, on the part of writers of the New Testament, in respect to passages of the Old adduced by them in connexion with the character, mission, and faith of their Master. And I conceive that such passages are comprehended under four classes.

To the first belong those, which really were supernatural predictions, and really are referred to, as such. For instance, when our Lord says, that Moses wrote of him,\* I understand him to refer to the supernaturally conveyed knowledge possessed by Moses of his future advent and character; a knowledge naturally incident to Moses’s office as minister of the preparatory dispensation, and expressed by him, for example, in that prophecy appealed to by

\* *John*, v. 46.

Peter in an address to his countrymen, “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me ; him shall ye hear in all things ;” \* as well as in Moses’s record of the promise made to the first three Hebrew patriarchs, that in their posterity should “all the kingdoms of the earth be blessed.” †

And on this class of references, being to real proof texts,—supernatural predictions fulfilled,—I find occasion for two remarks. The first is, that they present no difficulty whatever in their application. The use of them in the New Testament does not strike the reader as foreign to their original sense. On the contrary, it is the sense which he would naturally put upon them as they stand in their original connexion. Secondly, I consider every instance of this class of references to be to the Law ; the Pentateuch ; the five books of the supernaturally endowed lawgiver Moses ; and not to any other part of Old Testament scripture. Whether, for instance, the famous passage in Isaiah, descriptive of some eminent sufferer, ‡ be in reality a proof text, a supernatural prediction of Jesus, or not,—a point which I am not now to discuss,—it is nowhere used for that purpose by the New Testament writers. § Peter says, “Who his own self bare our

\* *Acts*, iii. 22; *Deut.* xviii. 18.

† *Gen.* xii. 3—xviii. 18—xxii. 18—xxvi. 4.

‡ *Is.* lii. 13—liii. 12.

§ I do not forget the conversation of Peter with the Ethiopian officer, recorded in *Acts*, viii. 30, *et seq.* But it is only the prepossessions of readers, that lead them to the conclusion of Peter’s having applied to Jesus, in the way of a supernatural prediction, the passage there quoted from Isaiah.

sins in his own body on the tree, by whose stripes we are healed;”\* and the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, that Christ “was once offered to bear the sins of many;”† and these are understood to be references to the language of Isaiah. But they are, at most, allusions, and not arguments in the nature of appeal to prophecy fulfilled. And Matthew, who much more exactly quotes the passage, employs it with a very different application. Jesus “cast out,” he says, “the spirits with a word, and cured all those who were sick, *that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, when he said, ‘Himself took our infirmities, and bare [the sense here must be, *bare off, removed*] our sicknesses.’”‡

The second class of these texts is that, of which I have treated at large in this Lecture, where nothing but a legitimate rhetorical accommodation is designed. They are taken, as from their nature they may well be, indifferently from all parts of the Old Testament collection. “Ye shall not break a bone

The narrative of the interview contains no declaration of that kind. All that is affirmed is, that the Ethiopian was reading the passage, which, whether rightly or wrongly, he appears to have understood as descriptive of the expected Messiah of the Jews; and that Peter, taking up the subject thus introduced, “began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” For myself, I think that, in the words quoted, their writer did design a reference to the Messiah, whom every Jew of his time expected;—a reference in what sense, it would lead me here into too extensive a discussion to explain. But, for aught that can be safely inferred from the account of the interview between Peter and the Ethiopian, Peter may have begun by a denial of any applicability whatever of those words to the Messiah.

\* 1 Pet. ii. 24.

† Heb. ix. 28.

‡ Mat. viii. 17.

thereof," was one of the directions in the law respecting the Paschal Lamb;\* the Jews, in commemorating, in after ages, their hasty departure from Egypt, were not to stop at the Paschal table to break the lamb's bones, to taste the marrow. As the body of Jesus hung upon the cross, the soldiers, for a reason given, forbore to deal with it, as with those of the malefactors, "that the scripture should be fulfilled," John adds, "A bone of him shall not be broken."† Jesus "came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth," records Matthew, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene;'"‡ where no other text seems so likely to have been in his view, as that where it is said, that Samson should be, or be called, "a Nazarite from his birth."§ When Herod slew "all the children which were in Bethlehem, from two years old and under," "then was fulfilled," says Matthew, "that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, 'In Ramah was there a voice heard, Rachel weeping for her children.'" $\parallel$  The reference is to a passage of the prophecy of Jeremiah, where, on the occasion of the calamity of Ramah, a city of the tribe of Benjamin, Rachel, the mother of that tribe, is beautifully represented as deplored their lot. $\P$  But the innocents of Bethlehem were descended from Judah, a son of Leah; and to suppose Matthew to

\* *Exodus*, xii. 46.† *John*, xix. 36.‡ *Matthew*, ii. 23.§ *Judges*, xiii. 7.|| *Matthew*, ii. 17, 18. ¶ *Jerem.* xxxi. 15.

have cited the words as a prediction of their fate, is to lose sight of all the propriety of the allusion.

The third class of the texts in question consists of those, which are produced as references to, or proofs of, the opinions entertained in ancient times, concerning the Messiah who was eventually to appear; and, when produced from any other part of the Old Testament except the Pentateuch, they leave it an open question, as far as their mention of such a personage is concerned, whether their authors possessed or not any supernatural information concerning him. To Moses the fact that a great prophet was to come after him could be known only through a direct divine communication. There was no other source whence he could derive it. The Jews of later times, however, knew it from his own recorded declaration; and, for a series of ages, every Jew, on Moses's authority, without any new inspiration of his own on the subject, confidently and joyfully recognised the fact. Sometimes this class of texts, indicative of the opinions of times between Moses and Jesus, respecting the coming Messiah, the nature of his office, the extent of his kingdom, and the spirit of his faith, are used by the apostles in argument with the Jews of their own day. But there is no instance of this kind, where the argument used implies an assertion, on the part of the New Testament writers, of supernatural authority possessed by the authors of the Old Testament language which they quote.

The first Christians, for instance, being all of the

Jewish stock, and full of their native prejudices, were discontented to think that Gentiles were to be admitted to their fraternity. James tells them, however, that it ought so to be, and adds, that “to this too agree the words of the prophets,”\* who spoke of God’s building again, as every Jew was persuaded that he would do, “the tabernacle of David, which had fallen down, and building up the ruins thereof, and setting it up,” and that then “the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles upon whom his name was called;”† and Paul produces Hosea to the same purpose ‡ as saying, “It shall come to pass, in the place where it was said to them, ‘Ye are not my people,’ there they shall be called, the sons of the living God.”§ It cannot be inferred, that such passages (and they are numerous) ascribe to the author of the quoted text any supernatural authority to settle the question on which they are brought to bear. The most that can be safely maintained is, that they enforce upon the Jews of the apostles’ times this argument; Whatever may be the bigoted notions of your nation now, it is clear, from the use of such language, that they have no countenance from the illustrious men of the former ages; they did not think about the perpetual exclusion of the Gentiles, as you do.

The remaining class of the texts in question, akin to that last mentioned, does not so commonly comprehend particular quotations, but consists

\* *Acts, xv. 15, et seq.*

† *Amos, ix. 11, 12.*

‡ *Romans, ix. 26.*

§ *Hosea, ii. 23.*

rather of references to the general tenor of the Old Testament, showing to the Jews, that, on their own principles of interpretation, without arguing the question whether those principles were correct or not, Old Testament scripture did not supply them with those objections to the faith of Jesus which they imagined. This class of texts is large, and differs from that just now described in this; that the former adduce from the Old Testament a positive argument, while these contain only a denial that the Old Testament, even in Jewish interpretation, presents any argument, such as was supposed, on the other side; — in short, a denial that certain prejudices of the Jews against Christianity, founded on a particular view of their own respecting their sacred writings, had any good foundation, even supposing that view to be in the main correct.

For instance, when St. Paul says that Christ “died and was buried, and rose again the third day *according to the scriptures*,”—\* that is, of course, the Old Testament scriptures,—I conceive his sense to have been not that Christ’s rising on the third day was expressly predicted in the scriptures (since that is a prediction which certainly is not found there); but it was “according to the scriptures” in the sense of not being in contradiction to them, as the Jews supposed it would be, who, looking, on the ground of their scriptural interpretations, for none other than a triumphant Messiah, regarded any assertion of the claim of a

\* 1 Cor. xv. 3, 4.

Messiah, who was to die, as essentially, and in its first aspect, undeserving of credit.

The perfect logical legitimacy of the four methods of quotation and reference now specified, I take to be unquestionable ; and under one or another of the four I conceive that all the instances in the New Testament very naturally arrange themselves. If it be so, then the famous argument of Collins ought to be dismissed from the controversy.

In my next Lecture I am to speak of Toland, Woolston, Morgan, and Chubb, whose writings afford an index to the state of infidel opinion in England, down to the middle of the last century.

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## LECTURE XIX.

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### OBJECTIONS OF TOLAND, WOOLSTON, MORGAN, AND CHUBB.

IT was a doctrine of an ancient philosophy, that time, in respect to the course of human affairs, as well as in respect to its natural divisions, was made up of a succession of cycles, so that, when one period was finished, another began, embracing the same events, recurring in the same order, as before. This was but a fable. And yet it does sometimes seem, as if there were really such cycles in the history of opinions. Opinions are proposed, canvassed, refuted, abandoned. They betake themselves for a while to obscurity. But by and by they re-appear, emerging afresh (so complete is the forgetfulness that has involved them) with all the attractions of novelty. Again they are the wonder of a day; again they are examined and rebuked; and again they vanish, to await perhaps some future transient revival.

In reading the history of infidelity during the first half of the last century, one almost seems to be anticipating the relation of what has been taking place under our own eyes. There was an exhibition of the same dreamy imaginative devotion, which, aspiring after something in the way of religion, better than what could be defined and proved, spurned all the solid foundations of faith, and lost itself in airy abstractions ; the same cultivation of a certain sort of mystical piety, which, until it was quite run away with by self-conceit and the infatuating fancy of new discovery, imposed on others, as well as on the individual himself, with the idea, that, in a relinquishment and contempt of plain sense and ascertainable truth, the mind might still continue to contemplate something substantial and nourishing. The very phrases, “historical religion,” “the ministry of the letter,”\* and the like, which, as terms of obloquy, have just now had a faint resurrection among ourselves, were the watch-words of Woolston and Morgan a hundred years ago.

John Toland, an Irishman by birth, was one of the first writers, who, in the last century, rendered themselves conspicuous in the controversy respecting the authority of the Christian faith. His capacity for such a discussion, as it was estimated by his contemporaries, may be inferred, with proper allowances, from sketches of his character drawn both by friends and foes. Of the latter I find a

\* Woolston's *Defence of his Discourses, &c.* p. 49; Morgan's *Moral Philosopher*, Vol. I. p. 408.

specimen in a few periods from a journal of the day, extracted in a Memoir of his life prefixed to the collection of his posthumous works. “The misfortunes of Mr. Toland,” says this writer, “are to be ascribed to his vanity. He affected singularity in all things (an easy way of being distinguished); he would reject an opinion merely because an eminent writer embraced it; he had a smattering in many languages, was a critic in none; his style was low, confused, and disagreeable; he prefixed affected titles to his tracts, in imitation of some ancient philosophers, in which he loved to talk of himself, and that in a most complaisant manner. Dabbling in controversy was his delight, in which he was rude and positive, as well as always in the wrong.”\*

This is evidently from an unfriendly hand, and I do not quote it as authority; but that there was some truth in the portraiture, may be inferred from the corroboration it received in a letter addressed to Locke by his respectable correspondent Mr. Molyneux,† who, from his attachment to religious liberty, had befriended Toland, but who found occasion to say of him, many years before he professed infidelity, “I do not think his management, since he came to this city, has been prudent. He has raised against him the clamors of all parties, and this not so much by his difference in opinion, as by his unreasonable way of discoursing, propa-

\* *Collection of Pieces, &c.* Vol. I. p. xc.

† *Ibid* p. xviii.

gating, and maintaining it. When a tincture of vanity appears in the whole course of a man's conversation, it disgusts many, that may otherwise have a due value for his parts and learning."

These representations, taken together, present to us the idea of a combination of qualities, which, whenever it occurs, is very likely to prompt to a championship of unbelief, and at the same time to carry with it a sort of authority such as its real claims by no means justify. The mere appearance of a degree of talent and learning on the side of infidel opinions is apt to pass with unreflecting minds for a voucher of the truth of those opinions ; and without doubt they owe some of their triumphs to this cause. But, granting even such partial mental accomplishments to be real, certainly they are liable to be found in union with a levity of mind incompatible with the exercise of a serious judgment upon any thing, and with an impatience for notoriety,—a notoriety always easily won in this way,—which proclaims opinions, not only before they are weighed, but before, in a careful way of speaking, they can be said to be formed.

Toland had attracted attention by what were thought his latitudinarian views as early as the close of the seventeenth century ; but I think there is no proof that the progress of his speculations had brought him upon infidel ground till some years after the publication of Lord Shaftesbury's writings. He was bred a Catholic ; but, while yet a youth, renounced that form of faith, and attached himself

to the Presbyterian communion. Of his numerous writings, mostly on religious subjects, I have occasion to mention but a few, as coming within the scope of our present investigation.

When twenty-five years of age, he published his “Christianity not Mysterious, or a Treatise showing that there is Nothing in the Gospel contrary to Reason, nor above it, and that no Christian Doctrine can be properly called a Mystery ;” a work, which, considering the peculiar senses attached by him to his terms, is far from justifying the opinion of his having become an unbeliever in the supernatural divine origin of Christianity. Nor do I find that there is any thing to prove that he had taken that ground earlier than the year 1720, when he printed his “Pantheisticon,” which, if rightly described, proclaimed him as an advocate of that Pantheistical system of Spinoza, which, in a former treatise,\* he had elaborately opposed.

I say, “if rightly described,” which I presume that it is, from the full and circumstantial accounts given of its contents. But there is probably no copy of it in this country ; it never was published ; and only a small edition was printed for presents to the author’s friends. The notion which he himself entertained of his merits and those of his Pantheistic associates, I find described as follows, in what purports to be a careful abstract of that treatise, by a German writer who possessed a copy ; † “He de-

\* *Letters to Serena*, p. 131, *et seq.*

† Staudlin, *Geschichte, &c.*, Th. II. s. 114.

scribes the Pantheists as the most tolerant and gentle beings, who persecute no man for opinion's sake ; who, without regard to honor or disgrace, and content with their lot, strive to live agreeably to their own principles, and not to those of others, to extend their insight, to improve their hearts, to advance the general good, and continually to bring themselves nearer to perfection."

But that book, if it were accessible, would only settle for us, at first hand, the question respecting its author's unbelief in the fundamental doctrine of all religion, and would not furnish any matter bearing specially on the argument of the Evidences of Christianity. In a previous work, however, he had (unwittingly, as he avers) furnished to others an argument, which may here conveniently receive the brief attention it demands. In 1698, he published an edition of the works of Milton, prefixing a Life, in which he took occasion to engage in the controversy respecting the authorship of the work called "Ikon Basilike," falsely, as is probable, ascribed to King Charles the First. He argued against its authenticity, and having, as he conceived, made out his point, he concluded with this remark ; "When I seriously consider how all this happened among ourselves, within the compass of forty years, in a time of great learning and politeness, . . . . I cease to wonder how so many supposititious pieces under the name of Christ, his apostles, and other great persons, should be published and approved in those primitive times, when it was of so much importance

to have them believed.”\* This was regarded, and publicly animadverted on, as an insinuation against the authenticity of the books of the New Testament. In reply, he asseverated in the strongest terms that such was not his purpose, and I see no reason to doubt his sincerity in so doing. And, to show what was the real subject of his allusion, he published a Catalogue, accompanied with brief remarks, of apocryphal writings still extant, or known at some time to have been so, relating to the early New Testament times, and thus attracted attention to the points of discrimination between such books and the books composing what is called the *Canon* of the New Testament. †

Thus, however free from any hostility to Christianity his intention may have been, he raised an important question in its Evidences; a question, which speedily received a careful examination, and, as there is no hazard in saying, was definitively settled. I formerly presented the proof of the origin of those histories of the ministry of Jesus which we have in the New Testament, showing it to be such as places their authenticity on a solid basis. But now, suppose an opponent of Christianity should say to us, This all looks well, but it is not the whole of the case. Besides the writings at present included in the New Testament canon, there were other writings circulated in early times, purporting to be works of apostles and of companions of apostles. Some of them are still extant entire; while of

\* *Life of John Milton*, p. 77.

† *Amyntor*, p. 161, et seq.

others only fragments remain ; and of some only the titles, made known to us by occasional notices of the fathers. Of these Toland made out a Catalogue, and twenty years afterwards a collection of such as still survive was published in the three volumes of Professor Fabricius of Hamburg. Why are not these, which the Christian world rejects as not authoritative writings, placed upon the same footing as those which it receives ?

Should any one ask us this, he would propose a fair question. What should we answer ? We should answer, as the indisputable result of the thorough investigations upon the subject, that, whereas the authorship of the New Testament histories is satisfactorily traced to contemporaries and disciples of Jesus, no other history whatever, purporting to be written by any apostle or companion of apostles, is quoted, as deserving of any respect or confidence, by any writer now extant or known, belonging to the first three centuries. So strong a statement as this is not to be taken upon trust. The particulars of it may be verified by any one in the admirable work of Dr. Lardner, "The Credibility of the Gospel History" (found in most public libraries), as well as in other treatises.

After the third century, the aspect of affairs among Christians was changed. They became numerous and opulent ; and, desirous as they would be to possess themselves of anything which professed to contribute to a knowledge of the establishment of their faith, there arose a motive to attempt to impose on

credulous individuals among them by supposititious writings. It was under this motive, to adopt the very probable conjecture of Paley,\*—in order to make a profit by the sale,—that the spurious books, known to have existed as early as the fourth century, were produced; and some of them appear to have obtained a degree of credit within a limited sphere, though none to any considerable extent.

On a review of their contents, Lardner, who, as usual, is condensed by Paley, judiciously remarks, that, so far from overthrowing the Gospel history, they confirm it; for “they are written in the names of such as our authentic Scriptures say, were apostles or companions of apostles. They all suppose the dignity of our Lord’s person, and a power of working miracles, together with a high degree of authority, to have been conveyed by him to his apostles. Every one who observes that these books are called Gospels or Preachings of Peter, Paul, Thomas, Matthias, Bartholomew, or Acts of Paul, Andrew, John, and other apostles, must suppose that the composers did not mean to disparage them. No; they had great respect for them, and knew that other Christians had the like. . . . . They therefore, who out of a regard to these books, or the great number of them, attempt to set aside or diminish the authority of the books of the New Testament, now commonly received, . . . . go beyond the intention even of the authors

\* *View of the Evidences, &c. Part I. chap. 9. § 11.*

[of the spurious books] themselves." And he proceeds further to speak of those writings as being actually, when their contents are contrasted with those of the canonical books, no less than "monuments of the care, skill and good judgment of the primitive Christians", and as affording "all the satisfaction which can be reasonably desired, that the books received by them were received upon good ground, and that others were as justly rejected."\* Toland had said, in allusion to his starting the controversy, "I made no objections then, nor do I make any now, to invalidate or destroy, but in order to illustrate and confirm the Canon of the New Testament."† Whatever hesitation there may be in pronouncing upon his sincerity in this assertion, certain it is that the event has proved to be no other than he professed to have contemplated.

Thomas Woolston, a clergyman of the church of England, presented a still more striking exemplification of the principle of the nearness of religious mysticism to religious unbelief. A principle, I call it. As a fact, it is certainly sometimes manifested. And on a little consideration it may cease to surprise us; for, where the imagination is allowed to have an unresisted sway, there of course the understanding, to which the proper proofs of religion are addressed, is degraded from its place. I suppose there is no doubt, that Woolston, notwithstanding the opposite tenor of his writings, fancied himself devout in a

\* *Recapitulation of the Second Part of the Credibility of the Gospel History*, chap. 165. (Works, Vol. III. pp. 131, 132, 134.)

† *Nazarenus*, Pref. p ix.

certain way, and that his reveries of something divine, residing in the mind of man, or else out of it and mystically communicating with it, passed with him for a sort of sublimated faith.

His mental idiosyncrasy, inclining him to a contemplative, self-contrived religion, in preference to one of definiteness and authority, was first indicated in the year 1720, in a published letter upon this question, “Whether the people called *Quakers* do not, the nearest of any other sect in religion, resemble the primitive Christians in principles and practice.” After the publications of Collins, of which I spoke in my last Lecture, Woolston wrote in their defence; and, as Collins had argued that the prophecies commonly appealed to in support of the claims of the Christian faith admitted of no such use, except in the way of an allegorical interpretation, Woolston proceeded to apply the same rule to the evangelical record of the miracles of Jesus, which, understood in a literal sense, he assailed with unbounded ridicule. His “Six Discourses,” as he called them, on this theme, attracted attention, and passed through several editions. It could scarcely have been otherwise, even if, instead of a lively and accomplished mind, their author had possessed but a feeble and unfurnished one. The simple fact of the extraordinary position of a clergyman, who scoffs at the Scriptures and abjures the Saviour, must needs attract to him at all times a degree of public curiosity and notice.

The argument of Woolston comprises two par-

ticulars ; first, that, to use his own language, “the literal history of many of the miracles of Jesus, as recorded by the evangelists, does imply absurdities, improbabilities, and incredibilities, consequently they, either in whole or in part, were never wrought, as they are commonly believed now-a-days, but are only related as prophetic and parabolical narratives of what would be mysteriously and more wonderfully done by him ;”\* secondly, that this view of his is no other than a revival of the common one of the first ages of the church, as exhibited in the writings of the fathers.

Woolston has sometimes been said to have adopted an allegorical interpretation of the Christian history, in consequence of his diligent study of the writings of Origen. But I think it much more probable, that this study was the effect, than that it was the cause, of the state of his own mind on the main subject. Had he been influenced by the example of Origen, he would have presented indeed some very fantastic expositions of the sense of Scripture ; but he would have proposed them very sincerely ; whereas it is apparent to any reader of his work, and was meant to be so, that, if he could refute the literal sense of the Gospels, he had no idea that Christianity could stand for an hour on the allegorical.

As to the point of a use of allegorical interpretation by the fathers,—a point, the bearings of

\* *Discourse I. p. 4.*

which, if it were established as to any particular text under discussion, would still be matter of controversy,—the argument of Woolston lies justly under the reproach of a constant unfair citation of authorities. I have compared a sufficient number of them to be satisfied, that no reliance whatever is to be placed even on the accuracy of his translations. But further; while it must be owned that many of the fathers,—particularly Clement of Alexandria, and his school,—put very fanciful senses upon Scripture, still nothing is more certain, than that, in respect to the New Testament history, they presented them but as secondary senses, founded upon the literal, instead of excluding it. This single fact disposes of that part of the argument of Woolston, which is built on a reference to their authority. They recognised the primary sense, and proposed a secondary; whereas Woolston's argument, to be good for any thing, required him to prove that they rejected the primary, and substituted a secondary in its place.

To show how he has here begged the question, and misrepresented the facts, I will present the quotations which he has placed in the very front of his treatise. “Let us hear particularly,” says he, in the opening of this part of the subject, “their opinion [the opinion of the fathers] of the actions and miracles of our Saviour. Origen says, that ‘whatsoever Jesus did in the flesh, was but typical and symbolical of what he would do in the spirit.’” Adopting Woolston's own translation, this sentence

of Origen would not suit his purpose, for when it is said, “ whatsoever Jesus *did* in the flesh was but typical,” and so on, the recognition of the things narrated as being really done, is fatal to the idea that Origen put only an allegorical sense upon the narrative. But a true translation of the words, which is as follows, “ Some things, *which then were done*, were types of those things which are perpetually accomplished by the power of Jesus,” still more absolutely forbids such a perversion.\*

The writer proceeds with another quotation from the same father, whom he represents as saying that “ the several bodily diseases, *which he healed*, were no other than figures of the spiritual infirmities of the souls that are to be cured by him.”† Here again, even on the translation proposed, the sentence would refute the argument which it is adduced to serve. But it is not a fair one ; rightly rendered, the words read, “ Every weakness and malady which the Saviour cured at that time among the people has a relation to the spiritual maladies of souls.”

The next passages, referred to for the same purpose, but not translated, are as follows ; — from St. Hilary ; “ The *deeds* of Christ are prophetic of something beside ; ” “ To the events recorded in the Gospels there belongs an interior sense ; ” “ Although those things *were done at the time*, we

\* “ Siquidem symbola quædam erant quæ tunc gerebantur eorum, quæ Jesu virtute semper perficiuntur.” *On the Miracles of our Saviour*, Discourse I. p. 8.

† “ Omnis languor, et omnis infirmitas, quam sanavit Salvator tunc in populo, referuntur ad infirmitates spirituales animarum.” *Ibid.*

are yet to regard what they prognosticate for the future ; ” “ The actions *now done* present an outline, a shadow, of what is to come ; ” — from St. Augustine ; “ The acts, *which were done* by Jesus, have a significance for any person, [or, of something else] ; ” — from St. John of Jerusalem ; “ Every thing *which Jesus did*, was *a sacrament* ; ” which, if we take the classical meaning of the Latin word I thus render, will signify, that every act of Jesus imposed an obligation on his disciples ; if we take the ecclesiastical sense, it will mean that every act of his was a mysterious, or holy, thing. Should I pursue the examples, I should have to continue a similar course of remark. One is led to ask, If such passages (which I have quoted in their order, as they stand where the general argument is propounded,) were thought by Woolston to favor his argument, what kind of authorities would he imagine would be suitable to refute it ?

But to pass to the main proposition of Woolston, to which this is but subsidiary. “ The literal history,” says he, “ of many of Jesus’s miracles, as they are recorded in the evangelists and commonly believed by Christians, does imply improbabilities, and incredibilities, and the grossest absurdities.” \*

It implies “ incredibilities.” If it does, there is an end of the question. Of course, the human mind not only should not, but cannot, believe what is no subject for belief. But nothing is metaphysically

\* *On the Miracles of Our Saviour*, Discourse I. p. 19.

impossible, which is within the power of God ; and this power no one, who believes in a God in any sense, will pretend to have been transcended in the miracles ascribed to Jesus. Nothing is morally impossible, the occurrence of which is consistent with God's attributes. Nothing, which is both metaphysically and morally possible, can be maintained to be abstractly incredible ; and having, in an early stage of these discussions, exhibited in full the proof, that the miraculous intervention, alleged to have taken place in Christianity, not only was consistent with the divine attributes, but that those attributes, viewed in connexion with the then existing state of the world, authorized a reasonable and strong hope of such an intervention, I will venture now to regard that part of the argument as disposed of, as far as it belonged to me to treat it.

But again ; the literal history of many of the miracles of Jesus, as recorded by the evangelists, implies "improbabilities." If it does, let us know what the improbabilities amount to ; for the mere fact that an occurrence was antecedently unlikely to happen, is nothing against it, nothing to discourage our belief of its reality. Every thing,—the most common, every-day event,—provided it involves any sort of combination, is exceedingly improbable till it has happened ; but this does not hinder, that, when it has happened, it can be proved. It was immensely improbable, two hours ago, that we,—just so many, and neither more nor fewer, ourselves and no others,—should

be sitting here at this moment, dressed just as we are, in such and such attitudes, and arranged in this order. An easy computation, under the doctrine of chances, would show that there were many thousands of millions to one against it. A denial beforehand that the fact would be just what it turns out to be, would be one of the safest things imaginable. Nevertheless here we are, under just these circumstances ; and if pains enough were taken, it might be proved to-morrow that we were here.

I do not mean to say, that events out of the usual course of nature stand on the same ground in this respect as others, but only to point out, in passing, how easily and groundlessly an argument may be framed out of an alleged antecedent improbability. As to the miracles of Jesus and his apostles, any peculiar improbability attributed to them must be judged of with relation to their occasions and circumstances. If, as I have formerly argued, the goodness of God made it reasonable to expect, that, under the given circumstances, a special communication of religious truth to men would be made,— a communication, which, if made, could only be authenticated by miracles,— then, on a consistent Deist's own principles, the mere fact, that the acts authenticating such a revelation were miracles, does not invest them with any peculiar character of improbability. All of improbability, that belongs to the act merely as supernatural, must, in this stage of the inquiry, be abandoned, as justification of any prejudice against it.

If the opponent chooses to go further and say,

that, looking one by one at the particular miracles recorded, he observes circumstances of incongruity, of unfitness, of incoherence, or the like, in the relations of each or any, creating in his mind a distrust of their reality, he resorts to a perfectly legitimate mode of reasoning. Only let him understand how far his reasoning will bear him out. If he has observed in a narrative some perplexity, some obscurity, some feature which he cannot account for,—if there is something, which, as he understands it, strikes him as improbable, highly improbable, peculiarly improbable,—he must go further yet, before, as a reasonable man, he can refuse it credit. He must consider whether the perplexity is capable of being removed or lessened by candid comment; or whether candid comment will show, that ignorance concerning the purpose and bearing of some circumstances might be expected to exist, consistently with the supposition of their reality as facts; or, once more, taking the objections in all their weight, *what* weight ought to be allowed them in opposition to the positive proof.

There is an infinity of things, of which we should have said perhaps all that we can say against those miracles, before we looked at the proof of their reality; but which, being acquainted with that proof, we all of us believe with a perfectly unquestioning assent. Incredibility stops the mouth of testimony. That shown, the debate is ended. But improbability does nothing of the kind. It only creates a contest between itself and proof. Is the

improbability strongest, or the evidence? That is the question. Or, in other words, which improbability is greatest and should prevail, the improbability that the events have happened, or that the evidence which maintains them is delusive?

When the question is brought to this point, as I confidently submit that it must be, it will be seen divested of its pretension to practical importance; for, assuming the related facts, of a sufficient occasion for miracles, sufficient power to work them, and strong external evidence to their actual occurrence, a skilful opponent of Christianity would scarcely be disposed to rest his opposition on any alleged distinctive improbability in the particular miracles ascribed to Jesus and his first ministers.

But, says Woolston once more, the literal history of many of the miracles of Jesus, as recorded by the evangelists, "does imply absurdities." This he manifestly intended for his strong point; and, with the aid of a free and coarse wit, he has extensively pursued his illustrations of it. I shall dismiss this part of his case with one remark, which, unless I err, covers the whole ground. A relation of what is wonderful in its nature, and unfounded in fact, is only subject for merriment; a relation of what is wonderful in its nature, and well founded in fact, is sublime. It is the *truth or no truth*, that makes all the difference; and to hold up any thing to ridicule because of its being extraordinary, is a mere begging of the only material question,—the question as to its being proved, or provable.

Some of us have read, in a recent book of travels, of a city in the untrodden ways of Central America, in which an isolated community preserves the order and magnificence of the high ancient civilization of this western world.\* To such as regarded the account as fabulous, it was a subject for no little diversion ; to those who read it under different impressions, it was, and well might be, a subject of intense excitement. Had a person come into one of our cities fifty years ago, and given notice that he should exhibit the actual preserved remains of an animal more ancient than the everlasting hills, how abundant would have been the mockery which would have rebuked the absurdity of that pretension. But, since then, geology has become a science, adding a new and vast store of perfectly ascertained facts to the wondering apprehension of man ; and of how opposite a character were our feelings, how full of admiration and of awe, when, a few evenings ago, was presented to us in this place the body of a fish, which, of no more consequence in its time than any one of the countless tribes that swarmed in the chaotic waters, had been disclosed again from the very bowels of one of the most ancient rock formations, to tell to modern man something of the story of (no one has yet computed how many) millions of years ago.† In minds not possessed of the evidence for the

\* Stephens's *Incidents of Travel, &c.* Vol. II. pp. 195, 196.

† The allusion is to one of the Lowell Lectures of Professor Lyell.

Christian miracles, and therefore standing in relation to it as if it did not exist, it was easy for the writer now under our notice, as it has been for others following in his steps, to create, by means of trifling and ludicrous associations, a prejudice against that marvellous character, which, as miracles, was inseparable from them. But the logical fallacy is exposed as soon as it is looked at. If they were not wrought, then laugh at them who will. But till that conclusion is arrived at, no touch of ridicule can affect them. Certainly their untruth is not capable of being proved by that, which itself has no other foundation than the supposition of their untruth. The very words, in which Woolston himself admits what would be the rightful impression of a well-sustained miraculous narrative, expose the worthlessness of all such reasoning. “I believe it will be granted on all hands,” he says, at the beginning of that discourse which treats of the three miracles of Jesus’s raising the dead, “that the restoring a person, indisputably dead, to life again, is a stupendous miracle, and that two or three such miracles, well circumstanced and credibly reported, are enough to conciliate the belief of mankind, that the author of them was a divine agent, and invested with the power of God, or he could not do them.”\*

Dr. Thomas Morgan was the author of a work, published anonymously, in the year 1738, under the title of “The Moral Philosopher, in a Dialogue

\* *On the Miracles of our Saviour*, Discourse V. p. 3.

between Philalethes a Christian Deist, and Theophanes a Christian Jew," to which he added, a year after, "The Moral Philosopher, Volume Second, being a Further Vindication of Moral Truth and Reason."

Dr. Morgan professed himself to be a Christian in his own way, which was this, as described in his own words. "Jesus Christ, as I think, has given us the best account of the Nature, Attributes, and Will of God, of any other prophet or lawgiver in the world, and therefore I am a Christian, in contradiction to any other historical religion, or a Disciple of Christ in opposition to Moses, Zoroaster, Confucius, Mahomet, or any other reformer in religion."\* He speaks in as strong terms as any advocate of Christianity can well do, of the need there was of a new revelation of religious truth at the era of the appearance of Christianity; of the "state of gross ignorance and darkness, which had overspread the whole world, both Jew and Gentile," and from which "we are recovered by the Gospel dispensation to the true knowledge of God and ourselves, and of those moral relations and obligations which we stand in to him and to one another;" of the "great uncertainty" then existing "concerning a future state and the concern of divine Providence in the government of the world," in the place of which, he says, "we are furnished with clearer conceptions, and

\* *Moral Philosopher*, Vol. I. p. 411.

brought to a more satisfactory way of reasoning about these matters.”\* “They who would judge uprightly,” he continues, “of the strength of human reason in matters of morality and religion, under the present corrupt and degenerate state of mankind, ought to take their estimate from those parts of the world which never had the benefit of revelation; and this perhaps might make them less conceited of themselves, and more thankful to God for the light of the Gospel.”†

But when he comes to indicate more particularly his view of the nature of that revelation which banished this darkness and uncertainty, it is in such terms as these. “The manifest design of the Christian dispensation was to bring men from this gross ignorance and darkness of superstition, to the knowledge of God and themselves, relating to their duty and happiness; and, as this was brought about by a peculiar and extraordinary Providence, by persons furnished with wisdom and knowledge much superior to the ignorant, stupid world, and armed with courage and resolution enough to venture their lives, and propagate the true religion in opposition to all the civil powers and laws then in being; I say, such a revival and propagation of the true religion, or of truth and reason in matters of religion, may properly enough be called a revelation from God, or manifestation of truth from him, who was certainly the author and director of so great

\* *Moral Philosopher*, p. 143.

† *Ibid.* pp. 144, 145.

a reformation in the world.\* Accordingly all external evidence for Christianity he rejects. "There is one," he says, "and but one certain and infallible mark or criterion of divine truth, or of any doctrine, as coming from God, which we are obliged to comply with as a matter of religion and conscience; and that is, the moral truth, reason, or fitness of the thing itself, whenever it comes to be fairly proposed to, and considered by, the mind or understanding."† And again; "I take Christianity to be that most complete and perfect scheme of moral truth and righteousness, which was first preached to the world by Christ and his apostles, and from them conveyed down to us under its own evidence of immutable rectitude, wisdom, and reason."‡

Other objections to Christianity, which, as being more formally urged by some other writer, I have referred to some other stage in this discussion, are produced in the course of Morgan's immethodical treatise; and, particularly, two thirds of his second volume are occupied with animadversions on contents of the Jewish scriptures, and on their baneful connexion, as he considers it, with the Christian scheme. But the characteristic doctrine of his work is that which has just been mentioned. Christianity is to be received, by whosoever receives it at all, because its doctrines and precepts recommend themselves to his mind as essentially true and right, and not because of any supernatural

\* *Moral Philosopher*, Vol. II. p. 23.

† Ibid. Vol. I. p. 85.

‡ Ibid. pp. 96, 97.

attestations to the supernatural character of its author. “There can be no connexion between the power of working miracles, and the truth of doctrines taught by the miracle-workers.” “Miracles, alone considered, can prove nothing at all, and ought to have no weight or influence with anybody.” “The supernatural power of working miracles has no manner of connexion with moral truth and righteousness, and yet moral truth and righteousness, when it comes to be proposed to, and considered by the mind, is the only sure proof or evidence of any doctrine, as coming from God, and to be received as a matter of divine authority.\* “I think it certain, that the being and moral perfections of God, and the natural relations of man to him, as his reasonable creature and the subject of his moral government, cannot depend upon the truth or falsehood of any historical facts, or upon our forming a right or wrong judgment concerning them.”† This is the doctrine, which, in various forms of repetition, such as I have quoted, makes a thread running through the treatise.

It may also have happened to some of us to hear this play upon words put forward as a solid objection to the pertinence and weight of the miraculous testimonials to Christianity, by persons who, without considering whereof they affirm, profess their faith in that religion on the ground of what they call its *internal evidences*, or its conformity to their views

\* *Moral Philosopher*, Vol. I. pp. 98, 99.

† *Ibid.* pp. 345, 346.

of truth and reason. I make three brief observations upon it.

First, it is preposterous for any one to pretend to a belief in Christianity, who at the same time professes to discard belief in its miracles, because, distinctly appealing to those miracles as it did, it was either a gross fraud, or else that appeal was a well-founded one. There is no conceivable medium between those two conclusions.

Secondly, to say that Christianity approves itself by force of its internal evidence, meaning by this its conformity to the sense of truth and right in the mind of the individual to whom it addresses itself, is, to be sure, to attribute to it a character which it really possesses,—that is, provided the individual mind be in a favorable state,—but it is to rest it upon evidence, on which it will not stand for a moment. The proof that it will not, is this. Those doctrines, embraced in it, which the most fully commend themselves by their intrinsic reasonableness to the judgment of a fair mind, (the moral perfections and parental providence of God, for example,) did not establish themselves in the convictions of the profound thinkers of antiquity, till Jesus came, and, with the sanction of miraculous works, authoritatively declared their truth. As far as their intrinsic excellence, and, of course, their internal evidence, went, that was the same before his advent, as it was after. But that evidence did not cause them to be received for true. They still remained subjects of denial, or, at best, of doubt. Or, take the car-

dinal doctrine of a future life and retribution ; in what sense can any man pretend to say, that any internal evidence, it carries with it, is a sufficient guaranty to him of its truth ? Independently of what he has been told on the authority of Jesus of Nazareth, who proved himself by his miracles to be a messenger from God, who cannot deceive, what more does any man know about immortality and a judgment to come, than was known by those sages of old time, who, sagacious as they were, far beyond the common lot of men, lost themselves in endless doubts on these great subjects, and, even when their guesses were the least erroneous, never pretended to any thing like certainty ?

Once more ; when it is said, that, strictly speaking, neither a miracle nor any other act, will prove an abstract truth, the proposition derives whatever of plausibility it has from an artifice of language. In the only sense in which it is true, no judicious Christian ever thought of maintaining the contrary. What the defender of Christianity maintains, is not that a miracle will directly prove an abstract truth, but that it proves that he who works it is invested with a divine authority. It is the ambassador's commission, establishing his claim to credence. Accordingly, what he announces in that capacity must be taken for a divine communication. The message which he delivers is God's message ; and, being God's message, it must be true. There are certain problems, profoundly interesting to us, which the best efforts of our reason, employed in in-

vestigation, are not competent to solve. Ample experience has shown that they are not. The condition of our future being is one of these problems. If we are to have a solution of it, it must be through a divine communication. The testimony of God, if we can but obtain it,—of God, who cannot but know the truth, and who cannot design to mislead us,—will settle all our doubts. That testimony his miraculous interposition assures us that we have ; and, if that miraculous interposition cannot be said, in logical strictness, to prove an abstract truth, it does however prove the presence of a certain testimony to that truth, which testimony is in its nature conclusive. “I think it certain,” says Morgan, “that the being and moral perfections of God, and the natural relations of man to him, cannot depend upon the truth or falsehood of any historical facts, or upon our forming a right or wrong judgment concerning them.” Certainly not ; but that is not the question. The divine perfections cannot depend upon any historical fact, but our knowledge or ignorance of the divine perfections may. If there be any visible historical fact, as a miracle, which makes out to the satisfaction of our reason another historical fact, namely, that God has sent a message to man, then, unless we will renounce our reason, we shall accept the substance of that message as true.

The last of this group of writers, in the former half of the last century, was Thomas Chubb of Salisbury. He was not highly educated, and

passed his life in a mechanical occupation ; but he was a man of an active and ingenious mind, and wrote in a clear and vigorous style which helped to bring his works into large circulation. Notwithstanding a rather original cast of thought, there is little of originality in his topics, the limited range of his reading confining him for the most part to the same classes of objections, which, with illustrations less full than his own, or of a different kind, had been urged by other modern writers, and some of which had no better foundation than a misconception of the state of the facts that occasioned him perplexity and distrust. His publications during his life, succeeding each other through a course of years from 1730 to 1747, had chiefly exposed him to the reproach of being a free-thinker in respect to the interpretation of scripture, and an heretical dissenter from the prevailing views of the Christian system. It was not till the appearance of his posthumous works that he became distinctly known as an opponent of the supernatural authority of that religion.

The reader of his numerous tracts will, I believe, observe only one material topic of argument, additional to those urged by some other writer, in connexion with whose name it has appeared preferable to discuss them respectively, either heretofore, or in some future Lecture. In his "Discourse on Miracles, considered as Evidences to prove the Divine Original of a Revelation," he presents a view, which, considering the advantage

afforded by popular apprehensions concerning miraculous power, I have been surprised not to see insisted upon by other opponents of the faith. Because of their silence respecting it, (with this single exception, as far as I know,) the point does not appear to have attracted attention on the other side. Objecting to the principle that miraculous evidence will never corroborate any thing but the truth, Chubb writes as follows :

“ I am to inquire, Whether a man who may be said to work a miracle (as the case is explained above) is at liberty to use such miracle-working power well, or ill, and employ it in serving what purposes he pleases. This inquiry is in some measure answered in the precedent section, in which it is observed, that men will be at liberty, whilst they are agents, to exercise their natural ability in serving what purposes they please ; for take away that liberty, and their agency ceases, or is destroyed. And, as this is the case with respect to the natural abilities of men, so it must be the same with regard to all supernatural power which may be superadded, whether it be that of working miracles, or otherwise. For, as the exercise of such power depends upon a man’s will, or at least he is afore apprized of the exercise of it ; so, in the very nature of the thing, it must be at his option to direct it this way, or that way, to make it attend the truth, or a lie. Indeed, God may, if he please, give to, or withhold such miracle-working power from a man, or he may withdraw it when

given ; but then he cannot give it, and restrain a man in the use of it at the same time, that being a contradiction, and an impossibility in nature.

“ If it should be urged as above, admitting this, then miracles prove nothing with respect to the divinity of a revelation. For, if he who works a miracle is at liberty to annex it to truth or falsehood, of which a by-stander cannot possibly be a judge, whether it be annexed to one or the other of these ; then it will follow, that miracles prove nothing in the present case.” \*

This argument, which, if the statement involved in it could be sustained, would be a weighty one, is founded on what I understand to be a popular, but an altogether erroneous, notion on the subject. To Jesus, to whom “ was given the spirit without measure,” and who, as he had perfect discretion, might be trusted (if one may so speak) with perpetual, inherent power, the capacity of working miraculously at his unrestricted pleasure may safely be attributed. But I conceive, that neither the reason of the thing, nor the language of Scripture, leads us to suppose that this was the case with his ministers.

Because I read that their master said to them, “ Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead,” and because I believe that they received that commission, and acted under it, I do not therefore infer that God gave them a power to control the course of nature in the exercise of their imperfectly in-

\* *Discourse, &c.* pp. 29, 30.

structed will; to stand for instance, in a graveyard, and summon its company of re-animated dead around them. I take it, that, though in popular language it may be said with sufficient propriety that Peter cured the lame man at the temple gate, or that Paul inflicted blindness upon Elymas the sorcerer, yet the philosophical and exact statement of such transactions is given in those other words of scripture, “*God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul;*”\* “*God also bearing them witness with signs and wonders and with divers miracles, according to his own will;*”† “*Barnabas and Paul declared what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them;*”‡ “*God gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.*”§

These men were the chosen instruments, through which a supernatural divine power was from time to time exerted. But it was not committed to their insufficient wisdom to select the occasions. That was the office of a wisdom infinitely superior to theirs. When the occasion came, they were supernaturally empowered to know that it had come, and to announce the mighty work to follow. This was their agency in the miracle, and this was what connected that act of God’s power with their persons.

Nor is any exception to this view of the nature of miraculous operations presented by the case of

\* *Acts*, xix. 11.

† *Hebrews*, ii. 4.

‡ *Acts*, xv. 12.

§ *Ibid.* xiv. 3.

those, who, being supernaturally empowered to speak in foreign languages, are known to have indiscreetly used that power.\* Was not a miracle, I may be asked, performed every time that one of those individuals spoke in a language which he had not learned by the common process? and, supposing that he used this gift injudiciously, was not a miracle just so often unfitly performed?

I answer, By no means. He was the subject of one miracle, not the worker of several. There was but one miracle wrought in his case, just as in the case of a leper cleansed. That was, when, by an immediate act of God, he was supernaturally put in possession of his peculiar gift. And all the necessary conditions, justifying the wisdom of that act, occurred, if, on the whole, the harmless power thus bestowed would be used by its possessor for the furtherance of the Christian cause; even though, being bestowed on a fallible man, it should not always be used discreetly. That one miracle performed,—the knowledge of the words and constructions of a foreign language once supernaturally communicated to a man's mind,—it remained there, subject, as to its exercise, to all the conditions of knowledge obtained in any other way. Once acquired, whether miraculously or by natural means, the mind could not again, except by a miracle, be dispossessed of it. And though, from the reasons of the case, it follows, that the individuals,

\* 1 *Corinthians*, xiv.

chosen to be distinguished by such an extraordinary endowment, would be such as, on the whole, would apply it to the advancement of its proper object, yet, with these explanations, it could not be said that a miracle had been inappropriately wrought, should they on some occasion employ their power unprofitably. Their different utterances in a foreign language,— indiscreet at times, if it were so,— were not, as has been explained, so many miracles. They were but the result of one, which was God's own act, and had been wrought under all the securities of his unerring wisdom.

If this view of miracles, as always, strictly speaking, acts of God, and never trusted to the imperfect discretion of fallible men, is recognised for what I esteem it, the only scriptural one, then it follows that the infidel argument which introduced it, falls to the ground, the possibility of their being wrought for the furtherance of any other purposes but the divine, being precluded by the conditions of the case. If only God's power works a miracle, it will be only God's truth that a miracle will ratify.

I shall next proceed to some remarks upon views of the historians, Hume and Gibbon.

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## LECTURE XX.

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### OBJECTIONS OF HUME AND GIBBON.

THE first Course of these Lectures, in which I undertook to exhibit a demonstration of the truth of Christianity, beginning with considerations of the nature of miraculous interposition, and proceeding to the conclusion that the doctrine of Jesus of Nazareth, having in fact been published with miraculous attestations, was to be received as a special message from God to man, brought to view two topics which introduced the names of the historians Hume and Gibbon. The first was, the antecedent credibility of miraculous operations, and of testimony affirming their actual occurrence, which was defended in opposition to the argument of Hume in the first part of the “Essay on Miracles” in his “Inquiry concerning Human Understanding,” wherein that distinguished writer maintains, that, miraculous agency being opposed to human

experience, and false testimony not being opposed to it, it is more reasonable to believe testimony to be groundless, than to believe miracles to be true.\* The other topic was, the circumstances of the propagation and establishment of Christianity, an undeniable effect which required a cause, and which, it was argued, could only be accounted for on the basis of a divine interposition ; — a conclusion opposed to the theory of Gibbon, who, in the Fifteenth Chapter of his “History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,” has attempted to explain the effect in question as proceeding from merely natural causes.†

To these topics I do not now recur. But other considerations, relating to the main subject, were proposed by the same eminent writers, to which it is proper that our attention should here be given.

The first point, which is thus presented, will not detain us long. Hume, of whom it has been perhaps not too indulgently said, that “his private character exhibited all the virtues which a man of reputable station, under a mild government, in the quiet times of a civilized country, has often the opportunity to practise,”‡ had by constitution no relish for the severe and lofty morals of the Christian code ; and the experience of a remarkably even and prosperous life had not brought him the instruction, by which, presented in personal experience, a

\* See Volume I. p. 54, *et seq.*

† Ibid. p. 248, *et seq.*

‡ Mackintosh, *View of the Progress of Ethical Philosophy*, p. 352.

mind so sagacious as his could scarcely have failed to profit. But still it remains remarkable, that one who could expatiate so philosophically as he has done on the obligations of benevolence and justice, should have overlooked the absolute and indissoluble dependence of both upon certain obscurer virtues in the department of self-control, which he thought he saw reason for excluding from an ethical system.

If his scheme of human virtue could in all respects be sustained, it must be owned that it would discredit Christianity. In his “Inquiry concerning the Principles of Morals,” — a work, which, free as it is, for the most part, from paradox, or even originality, he had the good judgment to prefer to his other philosophical writings, — in the course of his argument that “personal merit consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others,” he insists that, “as every quality, which is useful or agreeable to ourselves or others, is, in common life, allowed to be a part of personal merit, so no other will ever be received, when men judge of things by their natural, unprejudiced reason, without the delusive glosses of superstition and false religion. Celibacy, fasting, penances, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues, for what reason are they everywhere rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose, neither advance a man’s fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society, neither qualify him for the enter-

tainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends ; ” and so on.\*

Now, as to what Christianity calls the *virtues* of self-denial and humility, — for “ silence, solitude,” and the rest, Christianity does not account to be virtues, and they do not belong to this question, — the standard, by which Mr. Hume here assumes to try their pretensions to that character, is certainly a very low and false one. But I do not care to stand upon that point. Assume it for the true standard ; and it remains to be asked, How was it possible for Mr. Hume, judging the habits of mind in question even by that test, to dismiss them from the class of virtues? Humility and self-denial, — such is the doctrine, — “ are every where rejected by men of sense, because they serve no manner of purpose.” What purpose ought they to serve, in order to escape this sentence of rejection ?

A Christian would be prompt to reply, They serve the purpose of pleasing God, since they are habits of mind, growing out of a becoming sense of his perfections and authority. But this answer would not be pertinent in an argument with Mr. Hume. What purposes then does he contemplate, the serving of which would constitute the vindication of these qualities? He explains, in the context ; — the advancing of “ a man’s fortune in the world, rendering him a more valuable mem-

\* *Inquiry, &c.* § 9. (*Essays, &c.* Vol. II, pp. 305, 306.)

ber of society, qualifying him for the entertainment of company, and increasing his power of self-enjoyment."

These are not the sublimest objects of life; and it is supposable, that a moral quality might serve some purpose, though it did not serve these. But suppose they were, will humility and self-denial bear that test, or not? Is what is so easily assumed concerning them, true in point of fact?

Does humility, for instance, not increase "the power of self-enjoyment," but, on the contrary, as it is expressed, "cross that desirable end?" What habits of mind does humility expel? Vanity and pride; — vanity, which constantly makes demands for approbation and applause, such as from their nature cannot be satisfied, and will be gratified even the less by reason of its own offensiveness; — pride, which above all things makes a man sensitively vulnerable in his social relations; which gives him the least of pleasure and the most of annoyance in all his intercourse; which makes him care less for kindness which every man may have, than for confessions of his superiority which are not so easily extorted; and which strips him bare to the touch of affronts, which, imagined or real, are notoriously so much harder to endure than mere injuries. Does self-denial "serve no manner of purpose?" To self-denial belong purity, contentment, patience, industry, prudence, disinterestedness. These virtues cannot exist without it; rather, they are departments comprehended in it, or synonyms of it.

Can even so much be truly said to the disparagement of these virtues, as that “they neither advance a man’s fortune in the world, nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment?” Justice and benevolence, in their various manifestations, fill out Mr. Hume’s idea of social virtue; but of both, self-denial, evidently, and humility, materially,—though this latter fact does not lie so much on the surface,—are indispensable elements. The highest type of virtue is commonly considered to be the heroic; but of heroism the very essence is self-denial, self-forgetfulness, self-sacrifice.

I leave this subject with a very partial exposition. It should be largely illustrated to do it justice. Could I think it necessary to the main argument, it would be my duty to go into a large illustration, to the sacrifice of other topics. But I have no doubt, that, apart from all question of the divine authority of the Christian rule, a just thinker, who will give attention to the subject, will conclude that it is impossible to frame so much as a plausible theory of duty, in which humility and self-denial will not have a prominent place; and that it must be owned to be a strong recommendation of Christianity, instead of a prejudice to its claim, that in this instance it has brought ethical doctrines into full view, which, as soon as thus distinguished, an enlightened philosophy cordially approves, though, before, it had failed properly to estimate them. One wonders

the more, that so obvious connexions and influences as have been pointed out, should not have had just consideration, when in another place, in the person of his Stoical philosopher, Mr. Hume is found speaking of the man of virtue as looking “down with contempt on all the allurements of pleasure, and all the menaces of danger.”\* To contemn pleasure and danger is the prerogative of no man, except him who has made close acquaintance with the offices of self-denial.

I pass to a brief notice of a topic presented by Mr. Gibbon, distinct from that formerly remarked upon in connexion with his name. The object of the Sixteenth Chapter of his History is to show, that toleration of diversities of religious sentiment was the prevailing spirit of the Roman rule, and that the amount of severity practised upon the early Christians was not so great as has been commonly represented; from which he would have his readers conclude, that the argument drawn in favor of the sincerity of the first publishers of Christianity from the danger to which their profession exposed them, may have been pressed too far. On this point I make three brief remarks.

First; when the advocate of Christianity argues, that the original witnesses to the fact of the miraculous authentication of that religion were honest witnesses, he does not rest that argument solely on their voluntary self-exposure in its cause to suffer-

\* *Essays, &c. Part I. Essay 16. (Vol. I. p. 140.)*

ings and martyrdom. I remind those, who listened to my remarks in a former Course, designed to establish the honesty of the witnesses, that the following considerations were also brought to view; namely, the enormous incongruity of the supposition that a wicked fraud was practised, to the end of establishing a system which teaches the most sincere, generous, and lofty virtue; the simplicity, artlessness, frankness, fair-dealing, every where apparent on the face of the record; the fact that, if there were fraud at all, there was conspiracy, a supposition refuted by the occasional differences and even dissensions between the confederates,—differences too serious, considering the essential interest of the questions which divided them, not to have been fatal to a plot, in which each party was at the mercy of the rest, and disclosure would have offered so easy an expedient of triumph and revenge; the trouble, inconvenience, labor, to which, independently of any hazard to life, the adventurers in such an enterprise exposed themselves; the extreme improbability that, if a fraud had been devised, the servants and successors of Jesus should have presented him as they did, in the character of a religious deliverer merely, and not in that, which their nation was prepared to welcome, of a political redeemer. These, and other like considerations, pursued into due detail, go far towards establishing the point of the honesty of the first witnesses for Christianity.\*

\* See Lecture VI.

But, secondly; it is the testimony of the first witnesses, and not those of later times, that in this argument we have occasion to confirm. We cannot indeed read, without strong emotion, nor without a persuasion of the force of the existing evidence which could sustain such an energetic faith, of the sufferings and martyrdoms of the believers of the second, third, and fourth centuries. But what we want especially to know is, by what tests the sincerity of the believers of the first century was proved. It is of less consequence to us, how many suffered in the persecutions of the Antonines and Diocletian. We would learn rather to what ill treatment they exposed themselves, who went abroad declaring that they had heard the gracious words of Jesus, and seen with their own eyes his mighty works. And as to this point, it has been shown by evidence produced at length in its place, that those first witnesses devoted themselves, by the part they took, to lives of peril and suffering, and that the extreme penalty of a violent death, which all braved, many were in fact compelled to pay. Of the persecutions of the apostolic age Gibbon has not spoken. He treats of none earlier than the time of Nero.

But, thirdly, with the means of information conveniently accessible upon the subject, no one will feel hesitation in saying, that the usual accuracy of the industrious historian did not attend him on this occasion, and that his candor was not proof against the influences which beset it. The question has

received the particular attention of the French philosopher as well as statesman, Guizot, and, more recently, of Professor Milman, in their notes upon Gibbon's History; and any who would judge respecting it intelligently, will do well to consult the authorities produced by them, as well as to refer to facts, bearing upon it, collected before Gibbon's time in such store-houses of knowledge as Cave's "Lives of the Fathers," and Lardner's "Credibility of the Gospel History." The most plausible ground of Gibbon's distrust is the uncertainty as to the exactness of the testimony of Eusebius, who is a copious authority upon the subject, and who, it must be avowed, is justly chargeable with a proneness to exaggerate. But Eusebius may be owned to have been guilty of gross exaggeration in this instance, and yet the number of martyrdoms, under the succession of emperors down to Constantine, will remain vastly larger than any purposes of the argument will require. Nay, that he could hazard such strong statements is a fact scarcely to be accounted for, except on the supposition that the unexaggerated reality was enough at once to excite the writer's imagination, and to secure the contemporaneous reader's assent.

Nor is Eusebius by any means the only authority on the point; but others, and among them Pagan writers, go very far to bear out his representations in all their force. Not to recur to the famous letter of Pliny to Trajan, what are we to say of that of

Tiberianus, Governor of Syria, to the same mild Emperor, within the first century of the preaching of the Gospel, wherein he says, “I am quite weary of punishing and destroying the Galileans, or people of the sect called Christians, according to your orders. Yet they never cease to profess voluntarily, what they are, and to offer themselves to die. Wherefore I have diligently used advice and threats, to discourage them from daring to confess to me, that they belong to that sect. But, in spite of all persecution, they persist still in doing it.”\* That punishment and destruction of the Galileans, which could weary the practised military and judicial severity of a Roman proconsul, certainly could not have been on a small scale. “Historical criticism,” says Guizot, “does not consist in rejecting indiscriminately all the facts which do not agree with a particular system, as Gibbon does in this chapter, in which, except at the last extremity, he will not consent to believe a martyrdom.” And he proceeds to give examples of the Pagan historians, who “justify in many places the details which have been transmitted to us by the historians of the church.”† The disingenuous treatment of this subject by Gibbon excited to an unusual degree of severity that most candid of critics, Mackintosh. “The sixteenth chapter of the History of the Decline and Fall,” said he, “I cannot help considering

\* Tiberian. *Epist. (Cotelerii Patrum Apostolic. Opp. Tom. II. p. 181.)*

† Milman’s *Gibbon*, chap. 16, *juxta not. 178.* Milman gives all the notes of Guizot upon the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters.

as a very ingenious and specious, but very disgraceful extenuation of the cruelties perpetrated by the Roman magistrates against the Christians. It is written in the most contemptibly factious spirit of prejudice against the sufferers. It is unworthy of a philosopher and of a man of humanity. . . . Dr. Robertson has been the subject of much blame for his real or supposed lenity towards the Spanish murderers and tyrants in America. That the sixteenth chapter of Mr. Gibbon did not excite the same or greater disapprobation is a proof of the unphilosophical, and indeed fanatical animosity against Christianity, which was so prevalent during the latter part of the eighteenth century.”\*

I return to Hume, who, in the second part of his “Essay on Miracles,” presents a course of argument, in some particulars different from what I have yet remarked upon, which also, in one of its branches, and in a different specification, is suggested by Gibbon in a passage of the fifteenth chapter of his History. The former of these writers makes an explicit allegation of four particulars of defect in all existing testimony to miraculous operations.

First, he says, “There is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as

\* *Memoirs of the Life of Sir James Mackintosh*, chap. 5. (Vol. I. pp. 245, 246.)

to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others ; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of being detected in any falsehood ; and at the same time attesting facts, performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable ; all which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men.” \*

To this statement, as intended to apply to the witnesses for the miracles of Jesus, I except as follows ;

As to the “sufficient number” of witnesses, Jesus wrought most of his miracles in the presence of numerous spectators ; among them, his twelve constant attendants, while others were only transiently about his person. As to the “unquestioned good sense, education, and learning,” said to be necessary to give security against all delusion on the part of witnesses, there is no proof that the first followers of Jesus were absolutely illiterate men. Too much has been said of their low condition. They probably belonged to the reputable middle class of Jews. One of them, John, was “known to the high-priest.” † One of them, Matthew, we read of as dispensing a liberal hospitality ; ‡ and the father of two carried on his business with the help of hired servants. § At any rate, education and learning

\* *Inquiry concerning Human Understanding*, § 10. Part 2. (*Essays, &c.* Vol. II. p. 113.)

† *John*, xviii. 15.

‡ *Luke*, v. 29.

§ *Mark*, i. 20.

are not requisite for escaping delusion as to matters of fact, cognizable by the senses; nor are men of speculation and erudition thought the best witnesses in the courts, as to things obvious to mere sight and hearing. Good sense is necessary to guard against delusion, and this there is no reasonable pretence that the ministers of Jesus were deficient in; while no education and learning would have increased their qualifications for judging whether they really saw a storm stilled by a word, or a leper cured by a touch. As to “undoubted integrity,” refuting all suspicion of design to deceive others, what proof of such integrity shall be allowed to avail, if not the proof found in those circumstances, formerly collected, and some of them this evening recapitulated, under which we receive the apostolic testimony? As to “credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, so as to have a great deal to lose in case of being detected in any falsehood,” it will not do by any means to say that, for a general rule, it is the great, who are most sensitive to the disgrace of falsehood, or whose falsehood is apt to be visited with the most severe retribution from society; and further, no man,—considerations of character and conscience apart,—can have more to lose than his life, which these men bravely put at hazard. Lastly, as to the facts being “performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable,” the celebrity of the part of the world, which is the scene of an attempt at imposture, has nothing

to do with the ease or difficulty of its detection. In that respect, provided the inquisition is likely to be equally jealous, the streets of Capernaum present an ordeal as severe as the Roman court or market-place. And as to publicity of manner, what could well be more public than the miraculous feeding of the thousands, or the cure of the blind man in the temple, subjected forthwith to a hostile examination of the most searching nature? \*

Secondly, says Mr. Hume; “We may observe in human nature a principle, which if strictly examined, will be found to lessen extremely the assurance which we might, from human testimony, have in any kind of prodigy;” † and he goes on to explain his allusion to be to the disposition of mankind to lend a credulous ear to tales of wonder. Let that principle be freely allowed. Men are imaginative and credulous, no doubt, and, under proper appliances, are prone to superstition. Still every such principle has its province and its limits. It is not an agent of mere capricious and indefinite energy. And let any one answer, whether he detects within himself a love of the marvellous so strong, that, should he be told that a person, otherwise undistinguished, had wrought some wonderful works, he would feel impelled to accept the story, without inquiry and full proof, when the consequence would be, as unquestionably it was with the early Christians, that he must devote himself to a new

\* *John, ix. 13, et seq.*

† *Inquiry, &c. § 10. Part 2. (Essays, &c. Vol. II. p. 114.)*

course of life, relinquish old friendships and associations, undertake unaccustomed labors, and face a host of appalling dangers. I can answer that question for myself; and I suppose the answer of others would be the same.

Thirdly; it is said, “It forms a very strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations.”\* But the nations, in which the miraculous relations of Christianity are now current, are the most cultivated nations of the earth, which suppose themselves justified, on the soundest philosophical grounds, in yielding them full credit. Nor can those relations, in their origin, encounter a reasonable prejudice from this cause. The period in which Christianity made its appearance was a period of high civilization, in which it would be a great mistake to suppose that Judea did not in some considerable degree participate. It had been over-run three hundred and fifty years before by Alexander; and, for three centuries from that time, had been constantly in communication with the Greeks of some of the kingdoms into which his empire was dismembered; and when, not long before the Saviour’s birth, it passed under another sway, it was the sway of the Romans, in that era of unprecedented refinement, contemporaneous with the downfall of the republic. Some of the Jews were superstitious, no doubt; — there is no time, when, to some

\* *Inquiry, &c.* § 10. Part 2. (*Essays, &c.* Vol. II. p. 116.)

extent, some portion of a people are not. But another element of prevailing sentiment among them, as among their masters, at the time in question, was that of a philosophical skepticism.\* To discredit the tendencies of opinion in the Christian era, it can by no means be called an ignorant and barbarous age, even in Judea ; still less would the remark hold good as to other parts of the empire, to which the new faith was however communicated with an astonishing rapidity.

“I may add,” says Mr. Hume, “as a fourth reason which diminishes the authority of prodigies, that there is no testimony for any which have not been expressly detected, that it is not opposed by an infinite number of witnesses ; so that not only the miracle destroys the credit of the testimony, but even the testimony destroys itself.”† This is not expressed with the author’s usual perspicuity ; and a reader would naturally understand him to mean, that there is no particular miracle appealed to by the friends of any religion,—Christianity, for instance,—which is not discredited by a larger amount of adverse testimony, relating to that identical alleged fact. But his meaning, as he proceeds to explain it, is quite different. “To make this the better understood,” he says, “let us consider that, in matters of religion, whatever is different, is contrary, and that ’tis impossible the religions of ancient Rome, of Turkey, of Siam, and of China,

\* Enfield’s *History of Philosophy, &c.* Book IV. chap. 1. (Vol. II. pp. 153, 155.)

† *Inquiry, &c.* § 10. Part 2. (*Essays, &c.* Vol. II. p. 119.)

should all of them be established on any solid foundation. Every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions,— and all of them abound in miracles,— as its direct scope is to establish the particular system to which it is attributed, so has it the same force, though indirectly, to overthrow every other system. In destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles, on which that system was established, so that all the prodigies of different religions are to be regarded as contrary facts, and the evidences of these prodigies, whether weak or strong, as opposite to each other.” And he presently goes on to specify certain stories of miraculous occurrences in ancient and modern times, concluding with the remark, “What have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses, but the absolute impossibility, or miraculous nature, of the events, which they relate? And this surely, in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation.”

In short, Hume would discredit the evidence produced in favor of the miracles which Christians receive, by referring to evidence for other alleged miracles which they reject, and representing the one to be as good as the other. Gibbon also labors, in his wary way, to create the impression that the miracles of Jesus and his Apostles stand upon no better grounds of proof, than do many of those legends of succeeding times which Protestant Christendom rejects; and this was what I had in view, when I remarked just now that the argument

of Hume, in one of its branches, and with a different specification from his, was also presented by the historian of the Roman Empire. The former found his illustrations in miraculous accounts of profane antiquity and of recent times; the latter, in narratives of the middle ages. "An historian," says Gibbon, "ought not to dissemble the difficulty . . . . of defining with precision the limits of that happy period, exempt from error and from deceit, to which we might be disposed to extend the gift of supernatural powers. From the first of the fathers to the last of the Popes, a succession of bishops, of saints, of martyrs, and of miracles, is continued without interruption; and the progress of superstition was so gradual, and almost imperceptible, that we know not in what particular link we should break the chain of tradition." \*

The nature of the argument thus proposed is first to be briefly considered, in order that we may distinctly understand by what sort of facts it needs to be sustained, so as to be effective in its application to a given case; and it so happens that Hume himself provides an illustration, than which none could better serve as a test of its validity. Having described it in the words just now quoted, he adds; "This argument may appear over subtle and refined; but is not in reality different from the reasoning of a judge, who supposes that the credit of two witnesses, maintaining a crime against any

\* *History, &c.* chap. 15. *juxta not. 81.*

one, is destroyed by the testimony of two others, who affirm him to have been two hundred leagues distant at the same instant when the crime is said to have been committed.” \*

I accept the supposed case, as a fair illustration. But I say, that the judge, if he is at all fit for his place, will suppose no such thing as it is here said he will, from the mere conflict of evidence described. If two men affirm that a third has done an act, and two other men attest, that, at the time when he is charged with having done it, he was elsewhere, it is true that the two testimonies are in substantial opposition ; but it is by no means true that the judge will thereupon decide that the first testimony, or that both, are false. No ; he will have to do precisely what the friend of Christianity desires should be done with its evidences and with the evidences of adverse systems ; that is, he will have to examine whether either of the conflicting testimonies has signs of truth, and, if either, which. It is perfectly reasonable for the unbeliever to say, Here are evidences produced for different religions ; show me, if you can, the differences between them, evincing the sufficiency of yours and the nugatory character of the others. But to take the ground, that, because miraculous testimony is pretended in corroboration of different claims, therefore no heed is to be given to it in connexion with any, is not reasonable, any more than it would be for a court and jury to say, Behold, here are advocates and wit-

\* *Inquiry, &c.* § 10. Part 2. (*Essays*, Vol. II. p. 120.)

nesses for both parties ; it is useless to give any attention to the matter ; the story of both is false.

And let us dwell a moment on another thought, which this topic suggests. Pretended miracles, we may be apt to think, have so often been the resort of fraud, that the pretension of miracle may reasonably create a strong suspicion of fraudulent design. The claim, in short, should be regarded as going far towards a refutation of itself. But when, let me ask, has miracle been the resort of fraud ? Of course, when a pretension to divine authority was to be urged. And why has it been then resorted to ? Precisely because it was declared by the common sense of men, that no other pretension would then serve the purpose. If that pretension could be substantiated, then the alleged revelation accompanying it deserved credit. An alleged revelation did not deserve credit, and would not obtain it, unless that pretension was put forth, and was substantiated to the satisfaction of those whom it addressed. Thus impostors have had recourse to the allegation of miraculous power from the very necessity of their case. They have pretended to be in possession of it, because, to the end in question, the mind of man demands it ; the mind of man demands it, because it recognises it as the proper signature of truth ; and will any one say that he will give no heed to that, which, provided it be well established, is the proper signature of truth, merely because, by reason of its possessing that character, impostors have exerted all their art to counterfeit it ?

In a court of justice, there is nothing but testimony that will expose the truth. Testimony must perforce be resorted to ; no other expedient will serve. Because true testimony will establish a true conclusion, and because false testimony, which looks as if it were true, will, by virtue of that appearance, recommend a false conclusion, therefore designing men contrive to bear plausible false witness. But no sane man would defend the soundness or the safety of the proposition, that, whereas some witnesses are not trust-worthy, therefore the truth of all testimony is to be distrusted, and all its benefit foregone.

The records of imposture then will teach to an inquirer the useful lesson to be cautious in investigation, but from the duty of investigating they will not at all dispense him. The Christian holds to the reality of the miracles wrought in attestation of his faith, in opposition to the reality of those alleged in favor of any other system ; and the Protestant Christian asserts that the miracles, related to have been wrought in behalf of Christianity in its primitive age, stand upon a much firmer basis of evidence than any which find a place in the history of Christendom in any later time. We are to see what can be said in contradiction of their views in these respects. We have attended to the independent proof of the miracles of the first age of Christianity. The argument we have now undertaken to treat invites us to inquire, whether our conviction of their reality is subject to be shaken by the extrinsic consideration of the existence of other proof,

of the same kind and equal amount, the validity of which we are not accustomed to admit. Because, if it is so, we are at least inconsistent in our reasoning. And if, further, it can be made to appear, that equally good evidence, in character and amount, may be produced for some adverse religion, as for Christianity, then the application of Hume's argument will need to be allowed in its full force; the equal conflicting testimonies will nullify one another. As then it will be impossible to trust our convictions in both instances, we shall be precluded from trusting them in either.

The reason why I have made this last distinction between being merely shown, in one case, to be inconsistent in our reasoning, and being compelled, in the other, to renounce our Christian faith, will be obvious. If it were true, as Gibbon insinuates, that a succession of miracles down to a recent time, accredited by the Catholic church, stands on substantially the same ground as those of the primitive age, then the Protestant believer, who receives the one and rejects the other, would be justly chargeable with inconsistency; but it would not therefore follow that the primeval miracles were false, because it might be that the similarly authenticated, more recent, miracles were true. And the belief in them both alike involves no essential incongruity; indeed every Catholic Christian actually entertains it. And when one considers this, it may well occasion some surprise, that Mr. Hume, having carefully explained his doctrine to be, that pretensions

to miracles wrought in favor of different religions will silence one another, should then have proceeded to fortify the argument with illustrations mostly drawn from the history of the Romish church. As far as these are concerned, it would be sufficient to reply, If the evidence for the more recent alleged miracles is really as good as for those of the first century, you have, it is true, disarmed the Protestant believer, because you have shown that he ought to admit both or neither. But you have left unassailed the foundations of Christianity in the minds of a great majority of those who profess it; nor can you shake it, until you have proceeded so much further as to prove that the equal testimony received by them as applicable to both cases, is, as to one, unsound. Then you may insist, that it should also be renounced as to the other.

Having remarked this in a word, since it is probable that all or most whom I address are incredulous as to alleged miracles, of recent times, in the Romish church, I shall shape my further argument accordingly, and attend briefly to the inquiry, whether any miracles whatever (those of the Jewish religion manifestly are not embraced in the question, because they come in conflict neither with Christianity in general, nor with Protestant Christianity in particular) present claims to credit, of equal force with those of the primitive age of Christianity; or whether, on the contrary, there is a wide and marked difference between their respective evidences, demanding that the one class

should be rejected, on the same principles on which the others are received.

The specification of Gibbon relates to the middle ages of Christianity. In language meant, of course, to convey more than meets the ear, he says, “We are insensibly led on to accuse our own inconsistency, if, in the eighth or the twelfth century, we deny to the venerable Bede, or the holy Bernard, the same degree of confidence which in the second century we had so liberally granted to Justin or to Irenæus.”\* “The knowledge of foreign languages was frequently communicated to the contemporaries of Irenæus, [that is, at the end of the second and beginning of the third century,] though Irenæus himself was left to struggle with the difficulties of a barbarous dialect while he preached the Gospel to the natives of Gaul;”† and in proof that this pretension was made in that age, he refers to a passage of Irenæus, ‡ in which, however, he makes no reference to the gift of tongues, but merely excuses himself for the rudeness of his Greek style, occasioned by his having passed many years in the use of the language of a barbarous tribe. Nor, since the time of that father, has any pretension of that kind been found to have been set up, with the sole exceptions of the Life of Pachomius, an obscure Egyptian monk of the fourth century, and the later Lives of the

\* *History, &c.* chap. 15. *juxta not. 81.*

† *Ibid. juxta not. 74.*

‡ *Contra Hæres. Præf. § 3.* (p. 4. Edit. Massuet.)

missionary Xavier, of the period of the Reformation.\*

“The expulsion of demons,” continues Gibbon, “was considered as a signal, though ordinary triumph of religion.” But if what is called demoniacal possession be, according to the opinion of some of the best modern expositors, the same with insanity, then it was capable of being sometimes cured by natural means, as Jesus seems to have intimated that it was, when he said, “If I, by the finger of God, cast out demons, by whom do your children cast them out?” The difference between his cures and those wrought by common agency was the same in respect to this malady as to others, those of blindness, for instance, paralysis, or leprosy. Others cured them, when they cured them at all, by natural means,—he without any such instrumentality; and it is very credible that, in the second or third century, cures of this kind might be effected by medical treatment, or addresses to the imagination, which a too easy faith might regard as manifestations of a supernatural efficiency.

He goes on; “In the days of Irenæus, about the end of the second century, the resurrection of the dead was very far from being esteemed an uncommon event.” But the passage of Irenæus, referred to by him in corroboration of this extraordinary statement, contains no note of time whatever, attributing such occurrences to his own age. He

\* Tillemont, *Saint Pacome*. Art. 18. (*Hist. Eccles.* Tom. VII. p. 94. Edit. Brux.) Douglas, *Criterion*, &c. p. 79. (Edit. 1754.)

speaks of the dead having been raised, but in terms which admit perfectly well of his being understood as referring to the apostolic times.\* On the other hand, Dr. Conyers Middleton, who had made a thorough investigation of the whole subject, asserts, that "from the time of the apostles there is not an instance of this miracle to be found, as having occurred in the first three centuries, except a single case, slightly intimated in Eusebius, from the books of Papias, which he seems to rank among the other fabulous stories delivered by that weak man."† And, as to the whole subject of a pretended succession of miracles, the same writer quotes some remarkable language of St. Chrysostom, in which that father, than whom none of his time (he died at the beginning of the fifth century) was better authorized to speak the sense of the whole Christian community, refers to the long discontinuance of miracles as a notorious fact. ‡

The work of Dr. Middleton, to which I have thus referred, entitled "A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church, from the Earliest Ages through several successive Centuries," is an elaborate investigation, conducting to the conclusion, as expressed in his own words, that "we have no sufficient reason to believe, upon the au-

\* The passage, no longer extant in the original Greek of Irenæus (a fact not mentioned by Gibbon), is preserved by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccles.* lib. v. § 7. For a judicious comment upon it, see Douglas, *Criterion*, p. 374.

<sup>†</sup> Works, Vol. I. pp. 58, 59.

<sup>†</sup> Ibid. p. 105.

thority of the primitive fathers, that any such powers were continued to the church after the days of the apostles.”\* Middleton was a man able and learned enough to be the antagonist of Bentley; and, liable as his work may be to objection in other respects, I see not how any one can read it, whether Romanist or Protestant, without allowing that later pretensions to miracles in the church, whether or not they be esteemed credible, stand at least on very inferior grounds of evidence to those to which we have formerly attended as establishing the miracles of the first age of Christianity. That some of the Christian writers in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries, as well as later, professed their belief in miracles of their own times, may readily be granted; there were men among them of very different characters; — some more cautious and discerning, some more credulous and volatile. But what we want, in order to place them on a level, in point of historical authority, with the writers of the New Testament, is, not the knowledge alone of what was their belief, but assurance also that their belief had a similar foundation. Suppose that Irenæus had asserted, — which it does not appear that he did, — that dead men had been raised to life in his time; that alone is no reason for confounding the alleged fact, in point of authority, with those related by the evangelical historians. We should need to satisfy ourselves, first, that he was honest in so asserting, — that

\* *Works*, Vol. I. p. 1.

he stated his sincere conviction. If we should become persuaded of this, we should then be ready for the inquiry, What were the grounds of this conviction? If we should find that what he related, he believed upon hearsay,—vague, or even circumstantial, and what he might esteem responsible hearsay,—that would fall far short of justifying a comparison of his statements with those of the evangelical record. Did he, once more, believe on the evidence of his own senses, what he relates; and, from the nature of the case, could his senses have been subject to no delusion; and did he testify not alone, but did other equally competent witnesses substantiate his story? Then we ought to believe his story. We ought to believe it for the same reason that we believe that of Matthew and John, concerning whom we have, to our satisfaction, ascertained these things. But no such case can be pretended; and, till there can, a Christian cannot be called upon, for his consistency's sake, either to admit the miraculous relations of later times, or to reject those of the primitive age.

Mr. Hume, in treating this argument, chose, undoubtedly as the instances the most favorable to his object which his great knowledge of history would furnish, those of the report by Tacitus of the cure of a lame and blind man by the Emperor Vespasian at Alexandria, the restoration of the entire limb of the door-keeper of a Spanish cathedral, in consequence of the application of holy oil, as related by Cardinal de Retz, in his “Memoirs,” and the

account of various cures, said to have been wrought, about the year 1730, at the tomb of the Jansenist Abbé Paris. The argument of Hume, thus illustrated, gave occasion to a work, particularly occupied with an examination of the specified cases, though it also included others of the same description. I speak of that excellent treatise of Dr. Douglas, Bishop of Salisbury, entitled “The Criterion ; or Miracles examined with a View to expose the Pretensions of Pagans and Papists, to compare the Miraculous Powers recorded in the New Testament with those said to subsist in Later Times, and to show the great and material Difference between them in point of Evidence.” Paley, in his “View of the Evidences,” also took up the subject, and contributed some valuable thoughts; and the two writers together have so exhausted this branch of the inquiry, as to leave nothing to be added, while the books are so common as to make it unnecessary for me to do more than refer to them. Dr. Douglas maintains, to use his own language, that “those extraordinary facts ascribed to a miraculous interposition among the Pagans of old, and Christians of later times, are all reducible into these two classes ;

First, the accounts are either such as, from the circumstances thereof, appear to be false ; or,

Secondly, the facts are such as, from the nature thereof, do not appear to be miraculous ;”

While, concerning the Gospel miracles, the opposite propositions are sustained, that,

“First, the facts are such as, from the circumstances thereof, they cannot be false ;

Secondly, from the nature thereof, they must needs be miraculous.”\*

The marks of falsehood in such histories he finds to be particularly three.

“First,” he says, “we suspect the accounts to be false, when they are not published to the world till long after the time when they are said to have been performed ;

Secondly, we suspect them to be false, when they are not published in the place where it is pretended the facts were wrought, but are propagated only at a great distance from the supposed scene of action.

Thirdly, supposing the accounts to have the two foregoing qualifications, we still may suspect them to be false, if, in the time when, and at the place where, they took their rise, they might be supposed to pass without examination.”†

Dr. Paley follows out these principles, and illustrates and applies the reasoning of the treatise in a course of remark constituting one of those rare arguments, which, when once made, are made once for all. It is so concise as to admit of no abridgment, so pertinent that no part can well be spared, and so clear and complete as to require no expansion. There seems therefore nothing to be done but to state its heads ; and this it appears proper that I

\* *Criterion*, pp. 47, 48.

† *Ibid.* p. 52.

should do,— common as is the book which contains it,— because it is the only way to avoid passing by entirely an interesting point in the general inquiry. Dr. Paley divides the evidence produced for alleged miracles into two classes, consisting of proofs relating, first, to their reality as facts, and, secondly, to their character as miraculous facts. As to the first, he says, “ We may lay out of the case, first, such accounts of supernatural events as are found only in histories by some ages posterior to the transaction, and of which it is evident that the historian could know little more than his reader ”; secondly, “ accounts published in one country of what passed in a distant country, without any proof that such accounts were known or received at home ; ” thirdly, mere “ transient rumors,” such as attract some attention, and then die out ; fourthly, what may be called “ naked history,” or what has been followed by no corresponding effect that can be traced ; fifthly, what, under certain defined conditions, is found “ wanting in particularity, in respect to names, dates, places, circumstances, and the order of events preceding or following the transaction ”; sixthly, such stories “ as require only an otiose assent, upon which nothing depends, in which no interest is involved, which demand nothing to be done or changed in consequence of believing them ”; seventhly, “ those which come merely in affirmation of opinions already formed.”

These tests are applicable to the credit of alleged facts, merely as facts. Proceeding to the tests of

alleged miracles in their character of miracles, supposing them to be facts, he shows that we are not justified in attributing this character, first, to any thing capable of being “resolved into a false perception,” as, for example, the supposed vision of Lord Herbert of Cherbury ; secondly, to what may be called *tentative*, or *experimental* effects, “that is, where, out of a great many trials, some succeed”; thirdly, to appearances in which, “allowing the phenomenon to be real, the fact to be true, it still remains doubtful whether a miracle was wrought,” as, for instance, the extinction, by a sudden shower, of the fire into which the Scriptures were thrown in the Diocletian persecution ; fourthly, to occurrences, “in which the variation of a small circumstance may have transformed some extraordinary appearance, or some critical coincidence of events, into a miracle ;”—in which, in short, there is room for some single exaggeration, such as, if admitted, would change the whole character of the transaction. \*

These tests are no more strict than is reasonable, and on the other hand they are sufficient. They seem to draw a plain line between real and pretended miracles. Whatever will abide them all, remains unassailable. Whatever will not abide them all, cannot be considered as proved. The Gospel miracles will abide them all. Of no others, brought into competition with them, can this be shown.

\* The above are the heads of Paley’s argument in his *View of the Evidences*, Part I. Prop. 2. chap. 1.

And besides, the great distinction remains in reserve, that, in respect to those others, no case can be shown of persons pretending, as the Christian witnesses did, to be original witnesses to their reality, who passed their lives thenceforward in labors, dangers, and sufferings, in attestation of the truth of what they delivered. The Gospel miracles were proclaimed at the time and place of their occurrence ; the report of them was not transient, nor unconnected, but produced sensible effects, which survive to this day ; it was not wanting in particularity of statement ; the assent which it obtained, if any, could not be one of mere indolence and inattention ; it did not come in support, but in bold contravention, of opinions already formed ; and lastly, supposing the alleged facts to be facts, they had also all the four specified marks assuring them to be miraculous.

On the other hand, as to the miracle of a double cure recorded of Vespasian, and selected by Hume as one of the facts best sustaining his argument, we have the account of it in a passage written by Tacitus at Rome, twenty-seven years after it was said to have taken place at Alexandria.\* He recorded it, not as of his own knowledge, but from report. It does not appear that he had examined, or that he believed it, but rather the contrary. It was not opposed to, but in favor of, received establishments and opinions ; it was calculated to confer

\* *Hist.* lib. iv. § 81. (Opp. Tom. II. pp. 390, 391. Edit. Boston.)

honor on the Emperor at an important crisis of his fortunes, and on the God Serapis. The infirmities said to be cured were capable of being easily counterfeited. And in short the whole transaction was such as accords with the supposition of collusion and fraud.

As to the extraordinary restoration of a lost part of the body, related by the Cardinal de Retz, his words are, “They showed me there [in a church at Saragossa] a man whose business it was to light the lamps, . . . . and told me that he had been seen several years at the gate, with only one leg. I saw him with two.”\* To this case part of the same remarks apply. It appears from the context that the narrator did not believe the statement, and it does not appear that he examined the restored limb, or made inquiries of the patient, or of others. The canons showed him a man, who, they said, had for years been seen with but one leg, and he saw the same person with two; but, for any thing that was proved or can now be known, the restored limb, supposing the statement of its previous condition to be true, may have been an artificial one. There existed also the evident encouragement to fraud, afforded by the correspondence of the alleged transaction with the prepossessions of the people, and the interests of their priests.

As to the alleged cures, finally, at the tomb of the Abbé Paris, Paley’s examination of them

\* *Mémoires*, Lib. iv. (Tome III. p. 411. Edit. Paris, 1817.) “Ce pré-tendu miracle,” the Cardinal calls it.

shows as follows. “They were tentative; out of many thousand sick, infirm, and diseased persons, who resorted to the tomb, the professed history of the miracles contains only nine cures.” “The diseases were, for the most part, of that sort which depends upon inaction and obstruction, as dropsies, palsies, and some tumors. The cures were gradual, some patients attending many days, some several weeks, and some several months. The cures were many of them incomplete, and others were temporary.” So that the most that is made out is, that, under the operation of strong moral stimulants applied to the imagination and nerves,—the potent effect of which is an acknowledged fact in physiology,—“out of an almost innumerable multitude which resorted to the tomb for the cure of their complaints, and many of whom were there agitated by strong convulsions, a very small proportion experienced a beneficial change in their constitution, especially in the action of the nerves and glands;—while some of the cases alleged do not even require that we should have recourse to this solution,” but are “scarcely distinguishable from the progress of a natural recovery.”

The general result of the investigation into these several cases is as follows;\* “These are the strongest examples, which the history of ages supplies. In none of them was the miracle unequivocal; by none of them were established prejudices and per-

\* *View, &c.* Part I. Prop. 2. chap. 2. *ad calc.*

suasions overthrown ; of none of them did the credit make its way, in opposition to authority and power ; by none of them were many induced to commit themselves, and that in contradiction to prior opinions, to a life of mortification, danger, and sufferings ; — none were called upon to attest them, at the expense of their fortunes and safety.” These characteristics those pretended miracles wanted. These remain unparalleled characteristics of the miracles which attended the first publication of Christianity ; and, being so, they refute the objection which has this evening come under our notice.

My next subject will be Infidelity in France in the Last Century.

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## LECTURE XXI.

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### INFIDELITY IN FRANCE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

“THE eighteenth century has denominated itself *The Age of Philosophy*. From the first to the last of its writers, from Voltaire to Mercier, all called themselves philosophers. . . . . This name, assumed with so much pretension, proclaimed with so much emphasis, repeated to very satiety, ought, for that reason alone, to encounter the strong suspicion of a reasonable mind. Reason is the foe of quackery ; and certainly there was something of this in the arrogation of a title, which ought to be awaited from posterity. It is posterity which assigns their character to the ages, while it receives the inheritance, and passes judgment on the monuments, they bequeath. It is France, it is Europe at large, which with one consent has acknowledged the long reign of Louis the Fourteenth, as an epoch of signal advancement in the arts of imitation, as well as in all that gives stability and grace to the social

state. But we do not find, that the writers who adorned it took upon themselves to anticipate the succeeding age, by baptizing their own *the age of genius*. From ours it is, that it has received those titles of distinction, to which no one contests its right. . . . . It has been reserved for us to bestow on our own time,—particularly in France,—and by our own sole authority, a kind of distinction such as to separate us from all other times, past and future.

It is yet to be seen whether in this we have estimated ourselves correctly; whether the eighteenth century, particularly in its latter half, and regarded as it ought to be in its governing characteristics and its general results, has been in truth an eminently philosophical age, in the fair acceptation of the word. In order to be proved such, it should undoubtedly be shown to be remarkable for sensible advances of the human mind, applying itself to all objects, which it is capable of advancing, connected with the glory and welfare of the human race. But if, on a thorough analysis, it should appear, that,— exceptions apart, as they always should be,— the general character of the eighteenth century (strongly marked as it has been, particularly in its last fifty years) has been that of the most shameful abuse of the mind in all departments, succeeding to the most excellent efforts of intelligence and genius, then should not the inference be, that in our time, and especially as relates to France, posterity will see only the most disastrous period of degradation, and that this grand title of

*philosophical age*, will to our posterity be, what it has already become in the view of all sensible men, a sort of very ridiculous nickname, a kind of designation drawn from contraries, like the name of *Eumenides*, which of itself denotes *graciousness* and *bounty*, but which the Greeks, that frivolous and facetious people, adopted to designate the *Furies?*"\*

It is with these words that the elegant and judicious La Harpe introduces his treatise on the Philosophy of the Eighteenth Century, a work written just at the close of the period which it surveys.\* It is not, as he goes on to explain, the condition of the exact or of the physical sciences that draws from him these reproachful comments, but the debasement of that higher philosophy, in the departments of morals and religion, which comprehends the problems of the profoundest interest to man.

Of this world of thought, Voltaire, born near to the close of the seventeenth century, and living down to the last quarter of the eighteenth, was in France the ruling genius. Voltaire and Montesquieu are in letters the two great French names of that brilliant age; but the riper judgment of the latter corrected crude opinions, if indeed they may be called more than unconsidered prejudices, which, in a still famous youthful work ("The Persian Letters"), he had avowed, and gave the vast weight of his mature fame to the cause of revealed religion; while the former, an infidel by constitution,

\* *Cours de Littérature*, Tom. XV. pp. 1—3.

as far as it is possible that one should be made so by the tendencies of a discontented, vain, and mocking mind,—a mind of a sort of diamond hardness, as unimpressible as sparkling,—labored in that vocation from youth to extreme age, from the time of the regency of the Duke of Orleans, from which every thing that tended to virtue was alien, nearly down to the time when the great nation of his birth,—the first of which history bears such a record,—proclaimed itself a nation of atheists, while it decreed a sort of apotheosis to him for conducting it to that position.

Voltaire was the friend and pupil of Bolingbroke, with whom he formed an intimacy during the retirement of the latter into France, and from whom, if it cannot be said that he derived his spirit of historical skepticism, he received an impulse which permanently quickened the restless activity of his mind in this particular direction. He had just arrived at manhood, when, by the death of Louis the Fourteenth, the licentious period, so well known in history as that of the Orleans Regency, began. The manners of the court emboldened the propensities of the young poet, and some verses in his first drama, the “*OEdipus*,” were a proclamation of the feeling which struck the key-note of his whole literary life.\* Voltaire could not properly be called learned. I but repeat the sense of the best and most

\* “ Nos prêtres ne sont point ce qu'un vain peuple pense,  
Nôtre crédulité fait toute leur science.”

*OEdipe*, Acte 4, Scène 1. (Tome I. p. 157. Edit. Paris. 1785.)

impartial critics of his own nation when I say, that his knowledge, though various, was extremely superficial; that, as to what he did learn, he devoured much more than he digested; and that, — a much more serious fault, and one which has caused, that, at the present day, no one thinks of appealing to him on a matter of erudition,— he was altogether faithless (to say careless merely is not at all to describe the case) in matters of history, of philology, and of philosophy.

But this did not hinder the effect of his writings, as it would have done, had they been prepared for the same circle of readers as his predecessors in the same argument had addressed. Infidelity, though first argued in England, was, if I may use the expression, first *popularized* in France; and this service was done for it by Voltaire. The English infidels, his predecessors and contemporaries, had treated the question as, and for, scholars and philosophers. This was true even of Chubb, who, though not a man of scholarly breeding, was a close as well as honest thinker, and preserved in his works a precise, unimpassioned, grave, philosophical tone of discussion. Such books were of a structure to present distinctly the points upon which the argument rested, and the statements which must not be taken upon trust; and the class of readers to whom they were addressed had a preparation of logic and of knowledge, qualifying them to pass judgment on the force of the reasoning, and the truth of the alleged matters of fact, or at least

warning them to reserve their conclusions upon this or that step until they should have made the needful inquiry. By Voltaire the whole style of the argument was changed. He addressed himself to all, who could relish eloquence, poetry, and wit; to all of the French nation who loved to read a satire or listen to a play. The easy, skeptical humor of Montaigne, (which, as I formerly observed, though never distinctly directed against Christianity, created in readers a habit of thought leading ultimately to that application,) and the more systematic levity and indifference of the philosophy of Bayle, (to whom the same remark may be applied, and who wrote for the French public, though he did not write in France,) these, among other causes, had prepared the way for a style of discussion, or rather of treatment, of the Christian faith, which did only the more execution on account of its want of precision, explicitness, and form.

There had begun also in Voltaire's youth, and there grew through his whole life, a passionate discontent with existing institutions, in which he, moved by the ambition and the conscious independence of talent,—and also, I think it must be owned, by a genuine love of freedom,—largely partook. The higher classes of French society, educated to a degree of cultivation that made them distrustful of much that they had been taught, and impatient of any restraints on the profligate indulgences which had become the business of life, were ready to cheer on an assault upon the faith which professed to

stand as the guardian of pure and honest conduct; and the people in the middling and lower conditions transferred to the church their disgust against the political institutions, whose oppressions,—in league, as it seemed, with ecclesiastical tyranny,—they had found so hard to bear.

To an audience thus prepared did Voltaire address himself, in an indefatigable use of the exuberant resources of his extraordinarily versatile genius; and, as far as sympathy between the parties avails in such a case, never did man represent more perfectly the *idéal* of his age, than did this writer the ready, impetuous, graceful, superficial, busy, witty, *anti-spiritual* Frenchman of the time preceding the Revolution. His assaults on Christianity were made in every variety of form, in poetry and prose, in plays and romances, in works of history and philosophy, in the light pamphlet and the learned encyclopædia, now with ridicule and insult, and now with all the tone of a genuine indignation, founded on a sense of supposed wrong. From its apparent sincerity and generous earnestness, the latter would naturally be contagious, while the former would do the mischievous work of attaching light and degrading associations to what, in order to be fairly, ought to be at least calmly,—not to say, seriously,—viewed. Thus a decisive effect would on the unguarded reader be produced by what were the most palpable of fallacies. Nothing but reasoning has in such a case a right to convince. It is not necessary that that reasoning should be in

one form or another. It may be comprehended in a sentence, and that sentence may be a gay one ; it may be but an implication, a question, a reference ; but, except just so far as it contains reasoning, the mind which it influences is deluded.

But in fact other things besides reasoning do persuade and decide ; and never were these *extra-rational* expedients of persuasion better understood than by this writer. He answered the most momentous problems of humanity with a jest. He worked at the foundations of the best established history with first this, then that, *innuendo*. Some unmanageable fact or principle lay across his path ; he met it with a downright assertion or denial, altogether unsupported, and went on his easy way. Such indefiniteness and confidence at once could not but do something of their intended work. A precise statement invites the reader to consideration and inquiry ; he inquires and considers, and then receives or rejects ; or at least, if he does neither, he knows that as yet there is no reason why he should be convinced. But the reader who is so warmed and amused, is insensibly led on without perceiving what progress he is making ; without perceiving how much has been proved, or even, distinctly, so much as what the writer undertook to prove, or what evidence he has adduced to prove it. He leaves off with only a vague impression, but not the less effective for its vagueness, that the writer understands the whole subject, and has carried his

point; that what he assailed, lies somehow exposed and overthrown.

The particular position of Voltaire in respect to religious belief it is impossible to define. His own testimony is so various as to have no weight whatever in the decision. As late as the year 1746, when he was more than fifty years old, he solemnly professed his faith in Christianity; while, in his more honest declarations, he appears sometimes as a friend of natural religion, sometimes as an atheist, sometimes as a universal skeptic,—a believer, not that there is a God, or that there is not, but that there is no ground, one way or the other, for any belief upon the subject. The best opinion is that he himself entertained none; for opinions, certainly, upon any subject, were not what his mind hungered to obtain.

But the question which we have to ask concerning him is different. It is, whether he has produced any objection to Christianity which it belongs to its friends to dispose of, in order to the more complete clearing up and establishment of its evidences. And, in reply to this, I have but to say, that I know of nothing original in Voltaire except his manner of managing the argument. His topics of objection are those of the English infidels, whose works I have already treated. Stripped of its ample attire of insinuation and merriment, his argument objects to Christianity, with Tindal, as being needless, unlikely, partial, and insufficient and unsuita-

ble for its intended use.\* With Bolingbroke, he calls in question the integrity of its records, and the reasonableness of its doctrines and morality.† With Collins, he denies the applicability of Old Testament prophecies.‡ He enlarges on the hint of Toland in respect to apocryphal writings of the early Christians.§ With Hume, he represents the Christian miracles as incredible, and, with Woolston, as absurd;|| and with Gibbon, whom, however, he anticipated in this, and who made no little use of his materials, he refers the introduction and establishment of Christianity to merely natural causes.¶

Neither to the philosophy of one portion of these topics, nor to the history of others, can I find that he has contributed any principle or fact, which at all varies the state of the argument, as our former reflections on the same points have represented it. There is, however, one subject of high importance, which he has urged to a greater extent than any preceding writer, and which has not yet received our particular attention. I refer to the connexion of the religion of the New Testa-

\* E. g. *Traité de Metaphysique*, chap. 9. *Philosophe Ignorant*, § 31. (*Œuvres*, Tome XL. pp. 82, 158. *et seq.* Edit. Paris. 1785.) *Examen Important*, &c. *ad calc.* (Tome XLI. p. 422, *et seq.*)

† *Ibid.* chap. 12. (*Ibid.* p. 300.) *Dieu et les Hommes*, chap. 33. (Tome XLII. p. 156. *et seq.*)

‡ *Examen Important*, chap. 14. (Tome XLI. p. 314, *et seq.*)

§ *Collection d'Anciens Evangiles*. (Tome XLIV. p. 65, *et seq.*)

|| *Examen Important*, chap. 10. (Tome XLI. p. 279, *et seq.*) *Histoire de l'Etablissement du Christianisme*, chap. 6. (*Ibid.* p. 327, *et seq.*)

¶ *Dieu et les Hommes*, chap. 35 — 37. (Tome XLII. pp. 171, *et seq.*) *Histoire de l'Etablissement*, &c. (Tome XLIV. pp. 372, *et seq.*)

ment with that of the Old. Not having space now to enter into the consideration of it, without the omission of other topics, properly embraced within the subject of this evening's Lecture, I defer it till the next, in which it will be equally in place. How far the spirit in which Voltaire approached that class of questions was favorable to their correct solution, may be partly guessed from the terms in which he presumed to speak of the critical labors of Newton, that sublimest specimen of the human race. "Newton," says he, "abased himself to a serious consideration of the question," Who was the author of the Pentateuch? \*

"The second epoch of the eighteenth century in France," says Villemain,† "was represented by Diderot,—the epoch of the distinct passage from deism to atheism; ..... from a tenacious but reasonable liberty to a hatred of all power; finally, from assertion of the right of free inquiry to a total abandonment of every principle."

The great work, by which Diderot moved the mind of France, and wrought for the accomplishment of its awful and not distant destinies, was that vast repository of knowledge, the "Encyclopædia, or Universal Dictionary of Sciences, Arts, and Trades." In this, as I scarcely need say, his principal coadjutors were D'Alembert and Helvétius, avowed atheists like himself. Helvétius was the

\* *Examen Important*, chap. 4. (Tome XLI. p. 254.)

† *Cours de Littérature Française*, (18e. Siècle. Part. I. Tome II. p. 259.)

first who systematically attacked the foundations of morality, substituting for them, in his treatise “On the Mind,” a system of materialism and fatalism, which became one of the fashions of that boasting time. D’Alembert did not parade, though he did not disguise, his disbelief in a superior intelligence ; nor does he appear to have loved his opinion with any thing of the ardor of proselytism. His great abilities were devoted rather to the culture of mathematical and physical science ; and, when he sometimes spoke of religion with a warmth alike foreign to the calmness of philosophy and of his own temperament, it seemed not to be so much hatred of itself that excited him, as of its institutions and its ministers.

Besides less systematic expressions of his disbelief in all religion, in a variety of connexions, in the Encyclopædia, the opinions of Diderot, unformed at first, but settling at length in an uncompromising atheism, are recorded in his translation or rather paraphrase of Lord Shaftesbury’s “Essay on Merit and Virtue” ; for to the English writers he owed much, and freely professed his obligations in his short treatise entitled “Philosophical Thoughts,” and in his “Letter upon the Blind, for the Use of those who can see” ; all three of which compositions appear in the first volume of his collected works. The “Philosophical Thoughts” would properly come under our survey, since, when that work was written, he was still a believer in natural religion. But, as far as it treats of Christianity, it presents no topic which we have not

already considered in connexion with some other name ; and indeed the principal division of it, relating to that subject, and entitled, "On the Sufficiency of Natural Religion," is little else than a brief abstract of the argument of Tindal, though it contains no reference to that writer. When he produced the last-named work, the "Letter upon the Blind," he had already renounced the belief in a God ; and his argument in it, aimed against that doctrine and against the reality of moral distinctions, belongs to another controversy.

The floating atheism of the Encyclopædia was systematized before long in the once famous book entitled the "System of Nature", generally attributed, at the time as well as since, to the Baron von Holbach, a German nobleman, resident in Paris, who had before produced a work entitled "Sacred Contagion, or Natural History of Superstition," and who, from the liberal hospitality extended by him, for forty years, to the circle of infidel wits, acquired the name of "the host of philosophy", *le maître-d'hôtel de la philosophie*. This work contains a concocted system of atheism and fatalism. It proposes natural science as a better substitute for all systems of theology, morals, and metaphysics. It revives the old Pagan dreams of the eternity of atoms and their fortuitous concourse to make a world ; and all existing notions of religion and virtue it represents as mere chimeras, or devices of imposture and oppression.

There was no more progress to be made in that

direction. The goal, or rather the bottom, had been reached ; and it was not the least surprising feature of that singular state of public sentiment, that Rousseau, a name identified, in the English and American mind, with opposition to Christianity, was looked upon by great part of France as its blindly superstitious advocate. He did not shrink from the responsibility of the position, according to what he understood its exigencies to be, and took that religion under the protection of his great name in letters.

He protested with that passionate eloquence, to which all that read the French language delighted to listen, that the majesty of the Scriptures amazed him, that the sanctity of the Gospel spoke to his heart, that the pompous books of the philosophers were little compared to it, that it was an indignity and wrong to Jesus to compare him with Socrates.\* He would have Christianity, as a public institution, supported for the benefit of religion and morality, and had found nothing else which would serve so well that end. At the tribunal of feeling and taste, Rousseau, in his own fervent manner, maintained the claims of Jesus ; but he added that the Gospel narratives contained much that was in his view incredible, that the history of its miracles did not command his assent, and that he could not rely on them as proofs of the truth and divine authority of the religion.† Rousseau was as much a

\* *Emile, ou de l'Éducation*, Livre iv. (*Oeuvres*, Tome IX. p. 140. Edit. Genève, 1782.)

† Ibid, (p. 142, *et seq.*)

disciple of Christianity as the English Morgan. He approved of much of the doctrine, but denied its sovereign authority. It was a remarkable condition of opinion, when such a degree of esteem could attract censure as a superstitious adherence and devotion.

But the century was not to close without one more phenomenon in this course of speculation. Atheism was still triumphant, but there was wanting an historical theory of the origin of belief. In 1781, Charles Francis Dupuis, in his "Memoir upon the Origin of the Constellations and upon the Explanation of Fable by means of Astronomy," proposed a system, which, thirteen years after, in the midst of the reign of terror, he presented in its fully elaborated form, in his great work, entitled "On the Origin of All Forms of Worship."

In this treatise he undertook "to analyse all religions by means of astronomy and physics."\* "There is nothing," he says, in the introduction to his work, "but the universe itself, capable of corresponding to the immense idea, which the name of God ought to convey." And again; "It is to the universe collectively taken, and to its several parts, that originally and generally men have attached the idea of the Divinity." "This being so, the first method of explanation of theology, and that most generally to be applied, is to refer the ancient fictions respecting the Divinity to the current of

\* *Origine de tous les Cultes*, Tome III. p. iii.

natural causes. The gods being but another name for nature itself, the history of the gods can be no other than that of nature ; and, since nature has no other history than her phenomena, the history of the gods will be that of the phenomena of nature allegorically expressed. This conclusion, which I regard as true beyond controversy, has naturally conducted me to the true method of exposition, which, notwithstanding the difficulties it presents, is yet the only one which can reasonably be admitted.” \*

The foundation thus laid, he proceeds to erect his edifice.

“I try my method first,” he says, “upon the great poems, whose fragments compose the confused mass of Egyptian and Greek mythology. The principal of these are the legends of the labors of Hercules, Theseus, and Jason, the voyages and travels of Bacchus, Osiris, and Isis, which all are solar or lunar poems, of which the Sun and Moon are the heroes, and heaven the theatre. I then seek to recognise the Sun under other forms and names, such as those of Ammon, Pan, Apis, Omphis, Mnevis, Mithra, Thor ; in general, under all borrowed forms, as of the Ram, the Goat, the Ox. I next detect the same sun under a form of more elegance, invested with all the graces of youth, under the names of Apollo, of Adonis, of Horus, of Atys ; next, decrepid through the passage of time, he

\* *Origine, &c.* Tom. I. p. x.

wears the beard of old age, in the characters of Serapis, of Esculapius, of Pluto ; and then he winds himself into the mysterious Serpent, the astronomical sign that precedes the winter. I likewise investigate the origin of the worship of animals, of plants and of other sacred symbols, and that of hieroglyphical writing.

“ After this essay, which by its success, warrants the correctness of my method, I penetrate into the sanctuary of the priests, and I withdraw the veil, beneath which they concealed their mysteries. Here I present a thorough treatise upon mysteries in general, and another equally complete upon the Christian religion in particular.

“ The former of these two treatises exhibits the origin of mysteries, their different classes, and a summary of all which relates to the forms of initiation, to their ceremonies, and to the sacerdotal functions. In its second part will be found a philosophical investigation of mysteries regarded in their relations to politics and morals. In the third is given a detailed explanation of the representations drawn from astronomy and physics, employed in them, and of that theory of spirit as distinct from matter, which was introduced into the scheme as a necessary consequence of the *hyper-cosmic* [that is, the supernatural] ideas, which spiritualists attached to these forms.

“ The second treatise, devoted entirely to an examination of the religious system of Christians, is likewise divided into three parts. The first contains

an explanation of the sacred fable of the introduction of evil into the world, by the famous Serpent of the Hesperides, who deluded Eve, and thus rendered necessary the intervention of a Redeemer for the regeneration of ruined nature. This fable is found in the second chapter of the Hebrew cosmogony, known under the name of *Genesis*.

“The second part treats of the Redeemer, of his birth, death, and resurrection, and presents a combination of all the traits which are common to him with Mithra, Adonis, Horus, Atys, Osiris, &c., and which prove to demonstration, that the Redeemer, designated under the name of Christ by Christians, is no other than the sun, or the divinity adored by all nations, under so many different forms and names.

“The third part, much more abstract than the first two, contains an explanation of the famous Trinity of Christians, or of the triple unity known under the name of Father, Son, and Spirit.\*

This is the outline of a scheme, in announcing which he congratulates himself that he has recovered “the clue to religious knowledge, that had been lost for many ages,” and that he has “cast the anchor of truth into the midst of the ocean of time.”† Under the hand of this laborious devotee of natural science, the dreams of a poetical antiquity are converted into problems in physics; the wild creations of fanciful, feeling, and uninstructed minds become

\* *Origine, &c.* Tom. I. p. xiii.

† *Ibid.* p. xvi.

observations on the precession of the equinoxes. We hear a great deal said, and perhaps not too much, of the learned and irrelevant verboseness of divines. Is there no word of similar animadversion for the author of three thick and closely printed quarto volumes, crowded with the most recondite erudition, expended on the illustration of such a theme as this?

Our particular business, however, is with the application of the theory to Christianity, in approaching which the author, while he could not but feel that it was the only practically important, seems also to have felt that, since Christianity appeared in an historical age, it was the peculiarly difficult part of his work. "I own," he says, "that, if there is a religion, which might be esteemed proof against the analysis we have undertaken to present of the forms of worship by means of astronomy and physics, and to be incapable of being confounded with the others, from which it has always assumed to separate itself, it is the religion of Christians."\* The governing idea in this portion of his work (in which, with the scanty materials that can in any way be pressed into such a service, he labors the argument, as best he may, through only one hundred and fifty pages, of some two thousand composing the whole treatise,) is announced in its first chapter.†

"A just apprehension," he says, "of the mysteries of that Mithriac [or Persian] worship, known to us

\* *Origine, &c.*, Tome III. p. iii.

† Ibid. p. 5.

under the name of the religion of Christ, depends essentially on the interpretation of the sacred allegories of the religion of Zoroaster, adopted by the Jews into their cosmogony. The theological ideas of Christians are intimately allied with those of the Jews, and the whole Christian religion rests upon the allegory in the second chapter of Genesis.\* The incarnation of Christ became necessary only to repair the evil introduced into the world by the Serpent who beguiled the first woman and man, persuading them to eat of the fruit of the famous tree of good and evil. The existence of the Redeemer Christ cannot be admitted as an historical fact, except so far as the conversation of the serpent with the woman, and the introduction of evil by that means, are also regarded in that light.

“If, on the other hand, that pretended transaction is only an allegory, the mission and redemption of Christ too are divested of all character of reality. The two doctrines do not admit of being separated. The nature of the first event necessarily determines that of the second. . . . If the first event was real only in a certain point of view, the second will be real only in the same sense. We have nothing to do, then, but to inquire in what respect the first was real, and whether it ought to be viewed as an historical fact, or a fact in natural philosophy exhibited under a veil of allegory.” And then he goes on to argue through the chapter, with great wealth of

\* He means the third chapter; so carelessly did he refer.

learning, that the passage in Genesis, in its original significance, was but an allegory, representing the gloomy and cheerless period of the year when the sun passes into the signs Libra and Scorpio, Scorpio being the Serpent, and Libra, or the Scales, being anciently represented by the figure of a woman holding them uplifted. “It is this annual phenomenon,” says he, “of the approach of cold in autumn in northern latitudes, which originated the fable of evil introduced into the world by the Serpent; and, the history of the fall being thus reduced to allegory, the history of redemption, founded upon it, is deprived of its basis as a matter of fact.”\*

We have here then another form of objection to Christianity, founded on a supposed connexion, of a particular nature, between the New Testament and the Old, and falling to the ground, if, in the alleged particular, it should appear that that connexion was misconceived. The ground which this writer takes is not simply, that there was no place for redemption, and that a divine interposition for that purpose is incredible unless there were previous sin and consequent danger and suffering to redeem from, — in which view all Christians would agree with him, — but it is, that, unless the account of the woman’s being seduced by the Serpent to eat the apple be true in a strictly literal sense, then the mission of Jesus is not an historical truth; and that the former is not literally true, because, on the con-

\* *Origine, &c.*, Tome III. p. 35.

trary, the account was only meant to describe, as he goes on to argue, a well known annual physical phenomenon. But this whole subject of the sense and authority of different portions of the Old Testament, and of the dependence of the New upon it, I have proposed to reserve ; and accordingly I have here only to add the remark (already perhaps sufficiently implied), that if the account of the *fall of man*, commonly so called, expressed allegorically, and not literally, that the race was involved in sin, — or even, still further, if the fact were that the race was involved in sin, though it had not been expressed in the Old Testament at all, — in either case the race would stand in need of a redeemer ; so that the reasoning of Dupuis would fail, unless he could show, — which he has made no attempt to do, by any criticism of the language of the New Testament, — that the New Testament had both assumed the fact of the literal exactness of the passage in question, and, further, had referred to the passage as detailing the specific and sole cause of the Gospel provisions for redemption.

The second chapter of that part of this treatise which is devoted to Christianity, is introduced as follows ; “ We have seen that the history of the pretended fall of man, which upholds the whole religious system of Christians, or the work of the mission of Christ, is pure allegory. We thence reasonably conclude, that the reparation of an allegorical fault can itself be only allegorical. We are about to prove that it is so, and that the restorer is

that physical agent, to which it belongs to repair physical disorder, and which unites in itself all the mysterious attributes of Christ, which accord only with its properties, and of which it alone affords a solution. We have already intimated that this restorer is the Sun, which in spring restores to the day its empire over the darkness, which the serpent of autumn had spread over the earth. It is the sun, that clothes our fields again with the adornments, of which the frosts of winter had despoiled them. Let us see whether Christ, that light, as the evangelist John says, ‘which enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world,’ has all the attributes with which a mystical astrology endowed the sun which it deified, and that particularly at the two principal eras of his life, namely, his incarnation and his resurrection.”\* And then he proceeds through the chapter, running a sort of poetical analogy, — a merely figurative correspondence, the easiest thing possible to invent, — between circumstances of the advent and resurrection of Jesus on the one hand, and, on the other, certain physical phenomena and (what he regards as having been designed to represent the same) certain qualities and acts which heathen antiquity ascribed to the objects of its idolatrous reverence. Jesus is one of the impersonations of the Sun, of which Bacchus, Adonis, Mithra, and the rest, were others. Jesus of Nazareth, rising from the grave, means the sun

\* *Origine, &c., Tome III., pp. 37, 38.*

breaking forth in his renovating glory at the vernal equinox.

What is to be said of an argument like this, the force of which would not be aided in the least by following it into its abstruse particulars? What more admits of being said, than what is comprehended in a single sentence; namely, that the hypothesis is all a mere defiance of historical truth. Here is a theorist, who, with infinite industry and contrivance, labors to weave a scrap that will hold together, out of the short untwisted threads of fragments of the Orphic hymns, and such like, to be put in the place of the ample, substantial, historical warp and woof of the times of the first Cæsars. If the question were of some system proceeding from a fabulous time, from some unexplored gloom of the unrecorded ages, then there would be place for learned conjecture in what fantastic operations of the wayward mind of man it might have had its origin. But the history of Jesus does not come to us from the infancy of the world, in the scarcely articulate language of its early fables. It is a plain record from an historical age; an age, in which men read and wrote, and had ceased to imagine agencies and attributes into persons, whatever they might have done in earlier times. And if there is any meaning in language, they who have transmitted it to us, whatever else we may think of them, certainly took Jesus, and knew that they rightly took him, for a person, and not for a creation of their own or of other people's poetry or philosophy.

Nor, impossible as it would seem to be to avoid in any way taking their word thus far, are we compelled to depend for this on their word alone. For this we have Pagan evidence, enough, had we no other, to put the question entirely at rest, or rather to forbid a reasonable man to move the question. There is the great historian Tacitus, who, seventy years after the crucifixion of Jesus, records that event, with some particularity of statement as to the government under which it took place. There is the Emperor Julian, who wrote expressly and largely against Christianity in the fourth century, Porphyry in the third, Celsus in the second, who all recognised the historical fact of the life and labors of Jesus, near as it was to their time, in a way to leave no more doubt of its reality, than it would be possible to entertain of the real and not merely supposititious existence of Plutarch or of Virgil, of Augustus or of Nero. The sphere, I repeat it, for a philosophical analysis converting history into fable, is that of periods whence no records have come. There may also well be doubt respecting other matters belonging to an historical age, but respecting the naked fact of the existence of a person who has operated efficiently on opinion and society, there can scarcely be any; certainly not, under such circumstances as accompany the fact under our notice.

On the remaining chapter of this part of the treatise, in which the writer undertakes to trace the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity in the godhead to

Pagan representations of physical phenomena, I have no occasion to remark. But before I pass from the consideration of his works, it may not be amiss, by way of a specimen of the remoteness of the sources, to which the ingenuity of French unbelief in the last century was wont to have recourse, to say a word upon a little treatise of his, of much less pretension.\* During the French military expedition to Egypt in 1799, the temple of Denderah was visited, and in the ceiling of one of its apartments was observed a representation of the signs of the Zodiac on stone. Taking for granted that it exhibited the relations of the signs at the time when it was sculptured, the French astronomers set themselves to determine how distant that time was.

Assuming from certain data (which it would be tedious to describe) exhibited by itself, that the place of the solstices, at the time when it was carved, was in certain signs, Dupuis calculated, that, in order for them to recede to their present place, no less than thirteen thousand years were necessary; in other words, that there were civilization, science, and art in Egypt thirteen thousand years ago, or seven thousand years before the creation of man according to the Mosaic chronology. Lalande, however, a much higher name in astronomy, found reason to ascribe to it an antiquity of only thirteen hundred years before the Christian era, or a little later

\* His "Memoir upon the Zodiac of Denderah" appeared first in the "Revue Philosophique" for May, 1806, and was reprinted, in 1822, as an Appendix to an abridgement of his great work.

than the time of Moses ; while Biot was of opinion that it belonged to a period six hundred years later than this, and other conclusions in distinguished quarters were equally inconsistent with the object of Dupuis. More recently M. Champollion, applying his newly-discovered method to the decyphering of an inscription upon the temple, has concluded that that structure, and of course the Zodiac which made part of it, is of no older date than the time of the Roman emperors ; a conclusion which I believe is now generally acquiesced in by the scientific world. \*

The voluminous composition of Dupuis was of a character to prevent its coming into extensive circulation ; but its scheme had already been adopted from the elementary treatise I first mentioned, into a work of different construction, and destined to obtain an extraordinary popularity, the “Ruins, or Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires,” by Count Volney. Following what he arranges as probable steps of the progress of the human mind in shaping its idea of a God, Volney traces it from the rudest, unguided action of intelligence, to a worship, first, of the elements and of the physical powers of nature ; secondly, of the stars ; thirdly, of sensible symbols, as animals ; fourthly, of two principles, — the scheme of Dualism ; fifthly, to the system of a future life ; sixthly, to the worship of the universe, under various emblems ; seventhly, to that of

\* For an account of the speculations on this subject, see Dumersan's *Notice sur le Zodiaque de Dendéra*, Paris, 1825.

the soul of the world, or the element of fire; eighthly, to that of an invisible personal Creator. Passing hastily by the religion of Moses, which in a few periods he represents as of Egyptian origin, he comes to that of Christ, which he calls an “allegorical worship of the Sun under the cabalistical names of *Chris-en* or *Christ*, and *Yesus* or *Jesus*

In his off-hand representations I find no occasion for any thing to be added to what was said upon the more elaborate exposition of Dupuis; except that it astonishes one to find what use is made, by such a writer, of arguments from mythology. For instance, because the Latin and Greek words which signify *God*, are said to have been derived from a Greek verb † meaning *to wander*, and equivalent to another verb ‡ from which is derived *planet*, or wandering star, he infers that the worship of the Greeks, when their language was framed, was directed to these heavenly bodies; — a thing very likely in itself, but scarcely the more likely on account of that verbal coincidence. § And great ingenuity is exerted upon the word *Christ*, as if it had something to do with the *Chrishna* of the Hindoos, or even with the *Cheres*, signifying *sun*, of the Hebrews, and upon the name *Jesus* as being formed from *Yes*, which three letters, by their numerical value, represent the number six hundred and eight, one of the solar periods; — when it seems

\* *Ruins, &c.* chap. 22, § 13. (p. 153, Edit. Boston, 1833.)

† *Θεῖν*.

‡ *Ιλαρᾶν*.

§ *Ruins, &c.* p. 147.

impossible to suppose, that Volney should not have known that there was no room for mystery and no call for investigation in the case ; that *Jesus* had always been, and continued in the Saviour's time, a proper name in common use among the Jews, and that *Christ* was but a Greek adjective signifying *the anointed*, and applied to Jesus because he was understood to be the *Messiah*, that is, the *anointed with power*, of which Hebrew word it was only the Greek translation. There can be no more unprofitable trifling than is seen in other specimens, in this short work, of this same kind of cabbalism; nor, unless we suppose involuntary mistake, which in such plain cases is scarcely credible, can any thing be more flagrantly disingenuous than such devices, which from their learned air are so well fitted to impose on readers unpractised in such studies.

A second argument, which, presented in an exceedingly vivid and imposing shape, runs through that part of the work of Volney that relates to Christianity, and without doubt does far more execution than the other, is drawn from the great variety of religious opinions entertained, apparently with equal confidence, in different times and countries, and constituting, when taken into one view, what the writer calls his *problem of religious contradictions*. He gives it effect by describing a concourse of devotees of different creeds, defending each his own faith against the rest, in the use of similar topics of recommendation, condemnation,

and proof. Divested of its apparatus of dramatic machinery, the argument is simply the same which was treated in my last Lecture, in a consideration of the attempt made by Gibbon, Hume, and others, to invalidate the credit of the Christian miracles by reference to other cases of a claim to miraculous operation.

I could not add anything, with advantage, to the views then presented upon that head ; and on a mind to which those views recommended themselves as just, this part of the reasoning of Volney can make no impression. We think, for reasons that have been assigned, that a direct revelation of religious truth from God to man, is an antecedently probable thing. We own it also for probable, that attempts at religious imposture will be made ; for it is easy to point to motives which may prompt such attempts. If a revelation is made, it must be authenticated by a miraculous agency of the maker ; we know of no other way. Because, if made, it must be thus authenticated, every pretence to it, in order to succeed, must be accompanied by a pretence of such authentication. We expect miracles, then, just as much as we expect revelation ; and we look for the pretence of miracles, just as much as we look for fraudulent pretensions to revelation. This being so, their having been falsely pretended in one case, does not in the least induce us to conclude that they cannot have been truly alleged in another. “Explain yourself,” we may say to the opponent, “as to this summary reasoning. Make

out your syllogism. Does it stand thus? ‘Where evidence to a fact is met by the allegation of another inconsistent fact, that evidence is invalidated ; the Christian evidence is thus contradicted ; therefore Christianity is a fable.’ We deny the major proposition. We insist that it is on no such principle that the common investigations of life proceed, nor, when thus nakedly stated, will any sensible man entertain it for a moment. There is good evidence, and there is bad. There is true witness, and there is false. The false, to secure its objects, will, of course, as far as possible, counterfeit the true ; and in religion, as in other things, the business of the reasonable mind of man is not to dismiss them both for the fault of one, but to inquire and decide which bears the one character, and which the other.

One topic more was dwelt upon with great effect by Volney in his “Ruins,” as well as by the whole class of writers who have been the subject of this evening’s Lecture. It is of the nature of an appeal to feeling, and loses or gains efficiency by a change of circumstances which have only an adventitious connexion with the Christian faith. The English infidels argued the question of its claim to credit substantially on its merits. They treated it as an independent question, concerning which some truth was to be predicated, apart from any accidental relations ; and their treatment of it accordingly was comparatively calm and logical. The French scholars, on the contrary, smarting under the sense of enormous political abuses, which the union of

church and state appeared to them one powerful instrument for upholding, easily came to regard the object of all religions as identical,—namely, that of political oppression. This is expressly Volney's ultimate solution of the existence of them, one and all.\*

There is no dealing with this statement as an argument. It is none; though, under the fit circumstances, it has great power for popular effect, and the just retribution of the unnatural union between religious and secular institutions is, that, as soon as it begins to prosecute the bad objects for which it had been cemented, it will bring into disesteem and danger the religion which it had designed to employ in such an unworthy service. A view to political advantages may be, in general, a very likely motive to prompt an attempt at religious imposture. But (not to urge how irreconcilable the supposition of such a motive is with the doctrine and conduct of the founders of Christianity) the mere imputation of it has no force to prove an actual imposture, nor, could an actual imposture in any case be shown, would it remain of much practical consequence to observe what was the design that impelled it. In countries where Christianity is properly independent of political institutions, it happily relieves itself from all accidental prejudice arising from this source. In France itself, the opposition to it, if not convinced or even conciliated, was

\* *Ruins, &c.* chaps. 8, 15, 18, 24, (pp. 38, 71, 79, 170.)

quieted, when the political odium was removed. Abundance of infidelity remained, and yet remains, in France. The writings of Voltaire, in particular, made an impression, not soon to be effaced, on the minds of that lively, and, in respect to this subject, uninstructed nation. But it ceased to be rabid against religion, as soon as it ceased to look at it under a sense of injustice, thus proving how merely incidental to the subject, and destitute of intrinsic applicability, were appeals, which, in different times, had been urged upon the public mind with a success beyond what mere argument would have promised.

The subject of my next Lecture will be the writings of Thomas Paine.

## LECTURE XXII.

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### OBJECTIONS OF THOMAS PAINE.

IN passing to the writings of Paine from those of the French infidels of the last century, we scarcely go back to England again. His name and his influence were cosmopolitan. He belonged not more to his native country, than to America and to France. He was born in the year 1737, in the county of Norfolk in England, and, after receiving a scanty education at a grammar school in his native place, undertook to push his fortune in trade. A pamphlet upon a local subject, in the year 1773, was the means of introducing him to the acquaintance of Dr. Franklin, who, perceiving his abilities, and his attachment to liberal views in politics, advised him to emigrate to this country. He accordingly established himself in Philadelphia in the following year as the editor of a magazine, where he presently distinguished himself by the publication of the famous pamphlet, entitled “Common Sense,”

recommending the separation of the colonies from Great Britain. This work gave him great popularity, and occasioned his appointment to the responsible post of Clerk to the Committee of Congress for Foreign Affairs. From this office he was dismissed after three or four years' service, in consequence of some disclosures which were interpreted as a violation of official confidence. He remained in America till four years after the peace, when he returned to his native country (taking France in his way), with a view to the prosecution of a scheme connected with some mechanical invention. While in England at this time, he wrote his "Rights of Man," in reply to Burke's "Reflections on the French Revolution"; and, soon after the publication of the second part of that work, was chosen a member of the National Convention of France, in which body he took his seat in September, 1792. On the trial of the King, he voted against a sentence of death; and, incurring by that course the ill-will of the party who carried the measure, was first expelled from the Convention, and soon after arrested and imprisoned. On the fall of Robespierre, he was released, having escaped the guillotine by mere accident. He remained till 1802 in France, and then embarked again for this country, where he ended his days seven years afterward, in the city of New York.

It was just before his imprisonment in France that Paine finished the first part of his treatise, entitled "The Age of Reason, being an Investiga-

tion of True and Fabulous Theology," which he committed to his friend, Mr. Joel Barlow, then in Paris, for publication. The second part was published by himself, immediately after his discharge, in 1795. The doctrine of this treatise differs from that of the French works most in vogue at the time. It is not atheism, but deism. Says Paine, in the preface to the First Part, "I believe in one God, and no more, and I hope for happiness beyond this life. I believe the equality of man, and I believe that religious duties consist in doing justice, loving mercy, and endeavouring to make our fellow-creatures happy. But, lest it should be supposed that I believe many other things in addition to these, I shall, in the progress of this work, declare the things I do not believe, and my reasons for not believing them. I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church. All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit."\*

As Voltaire had been the first to urge the argument against Christianity in a style and with a selection of topics adapted to the popular mind, so Paine was the first to treat it in this manner for

\* *Theological Works* of Thomas Paine, pp. 31, 32. (Edit. Lond. 1824.)

English readers. To learning he not only made no pretension, but he spoke of it with contempt,\* with the exception of physical science, in which however his own attainments were scarcely greater than in other departments of knowledge. But he wrote his native language with great facility, precision, perspicuity, and force. He urged his arguments with that appearance of confidence in them on his own part, and of conscious triumph, which pass for much with a large class of readers; and with the friends of liberal institutions everywhere, especially in this country, which he had served in so critical a juncture of its affairs, gratitude for his political services gave him an influence, which became an important element of both the currency and the success of his writings on religion.

With the exception of one topic, which I shall presently name, the two parts of the "Age of Reason" of Paine, were, I think, made up from the writings of Voltaire. It is true that arguments are here repeated which have been before in the use of so many other writers, that they may properly be called the common places of infidelity. But the whole style of presenting them is distinctly that of the French arch-wit; — the same easy as-

\* He was capable of such an argument, as the following against the Hebrew origin of the book of Job. "The astronomical names, *Pleiades*, *Orion*, and *Arcturus*, are Greek, and not Hebrew, names; . . . . the Jews had no translation of those names into their own language, but adopted the names as they found them in the poem." *Theological Works*, p. 107. Of course, he supposed those names to be found in the Hebrew text.

sumption of victory ; the same exaggeration of difficulties on one side, and blindness to them on the other ; the same libertine grossness.

A superficial reader of the "Age of Reason" would infer that its author had a remarkable acquaintance with the Bible, so numerous and particular are its scriptural references. But occasional mistakes show that he could not have known so much in this way, as he appears to have done, without knowing much more. For instance, he argues quite formally, that, "if, according to Matthew, the eleven went into Galilee to meet Jesus in a mountain by his own appointment, Luke and John must have been two of that eleven";\* when every tolerably careful reader of the New Testament knows that Luke was not an apostle. And that this was not a mere accident, appears from his repetition of the same thing in other places, and that too with the addition of the name of Mark, of whom the same observation holds good.† And he speaks of "the whole space of time, from the crucifixion to what is called the ascension," being "but a few days, apparently not more than three or four,"‡ when the express statement of the history is, that Jesus "showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of his apostles forty days."§ Such examples occur in the Second Part, after, as he says in the introduction to it, he had furnished himself with a Bible and a Testament,

\* *Theological Works*, p. 136.

† *Ibid.* p. 138.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 138.

§ *Acts.* i. 3.

¶ *Acts.* i. 3.

neither of which, he adds, he had possessed or could procure, while writing the former Part. This extensive and rather exact acquaintance with many particulars, taken in connexion with the errors in relation to others more likely to be known, naturally suggests the inference of its being obtained at second-hand; and the whole complexion of the argument is so strikingly that of Voltaire, as to leave little room for doubt respecting the original to which it is to be referred.

I intimated just now, that there was but one topic, in respect to which the argument of Paine could advance any pretension to originality. "After I had made myself," he says, "master of the use of the globes and of the orrery, and conceived an idea of the infinity of space, and the eternal divisibility of matter, and obtained, at least, a general knowledge of what is called natural philosophy, I began to compare, or, as I have before said, to confront the eternal evidence those things afford with the Christian system of faith."\* He then goes on to speak of the system of the material universe, as modern philosophy has ascertained it, consisting of unnumbered worlds, in which, to use his language, our earth, compared "with the immensity of space in which it is suspended, . . . . is infinitely less, in proportion, than the smallest grain of sand is to the size of the world, or the finest particle of dew to the whole ocean;" and he asks in conclusion,

\* *Theological Works*, p. 61.

“ Whence could arise the solitary and strange conceit, that the Almighty, who had millions of worlds equally dependent on his protection, should quit the care of all the rest, and come to die in our world, because, they say, one man and one woman had eaten an apple? And, on the other hand, are we to suppose that every world in the boundless creation had an Eve, an apple, a serpent, and a redeemer? In this case, the person, who is irreverently called the son of God, and sometimes God himself, would have nothing else to do than to travel from world to world, in an endless succession of death, with scarcely a momentary interval of life.” \*

An analysis of this argument, it will be observed, reduces it into three parts.

In the first place, it condemns the absurdity of supposing, that such extraordinary provision should be made for the reparation of a mischief originating in so slight a cause as the specified act of disobedience on the part of the first parents of the human race. The obvious reply to this is, that, supposing an evil of great magnitude to have existed, whether its origin was of one kind or another, it was worthy of the divine wisdom and benevolence to make sufficient provision for its cure, whatever that sufficient provision might be. The argument then does not lie against the necessity and fitness of the Christian revelation,— which was justified by the mere existence of moral evil, how-

\* *Theological Works*, p. 66.

ever caused, — but against the reasonableness of a certain interpretation of a passage in the Old Testament. Thus the question raised, — the same with that presented in the writings of Dupuis, as was remarked in my last Lecture, — is seen to refer itself to that important class of questions, of which I am presently to speak, relating to the exposition of the Old Testament, and its connexion with the New.

Secondly ; the argument is, How incredible that the Almighty, who had millions of worlds equally dependent on his protection, should quit the care of all the rest, and come to die in our world. I am one of those, for whom this argument has no force whatever, inasmuch as we do not admit the correctness of the representation of fact, on which it is founded. We understand the sense of the New Testament to be, not that it was the Almighty who thus appeared upon our earth, but a good Being commissioned by him in his infinite benevolence. If our interpretation be correct, there is no more to be said upon the point. Believing it to be correct, I am incapable of doing justice to the argument, which they who entertain a different opinion, — who admit in this case the premises of Paine, — would use to set aside his conclusion. They would say, that we could not reasonably expect to be informed respecting the methods of the divine moral government in other worlds, which, whatever they may be, will be, here and elsewhere, suited to their end ; and that our ignorance concerning them can-

not reasonably create any distrust in relation to what is revealed to us of its processes in this world, respecting which we are informed. And they would add, that it may be, for aught that we know, that the benefits of the redemption, wrought in this world, may be extended to the inhabitants of other planets, and even to other orders of being; and that, insignificant, when judged by a mere material standard, as this earth may seem, we are in no degree qualified judges of the fitness of the choice of a scene for so momentous a transaction.

But, in its remaining aspect, the argument demands the attention of all Christians alike. Is it credible, it is virtually asked, that the Almighty Creator and Ruler of this vast universe, the mysterious, sublime Intelligence, in whom all things live and move and are, should, amidst the cares of his boundless empire, condescend to concern himself for the condition of a race of feeble creatures on this floating atom we call earth, so as, when they had disobeyed him and harmed themselves, to put forth manifestly his resistless power in provisions for their recovery and welfare?

To this inquiry I confidently answer, Yes; and that to doubt it, is to entertain merely false and base ideas of his unrivalled greatness. To suppose that God will not condescend, as we call it, to any office of benevolence to his meanest creature, is only to introduce a foreign and uncongenial element into the grand idea. Our notion that any thing little is unworthy of the care of greatness,

is derived not from the greatness of great men, but, on the contrary, from the imperfection and limitations of those attributes which make them great. Men are, at the best, so partially endowed, that no one can do more than a portion of what he would. Every man must select a part of what invites his attention, and leave the rest. In the natural distribution, those of more feeble capacity apply themselves to the meaner tasks ; those of better gifts, to the more elevated ; and accordingly the duties, which, while more responsibly employed themselves, they leave to their inferiors, come to be regarded as something beneath their dignity. Were there any man equal to what we call the higher and lower tasks at once, he would be far greater and more admirable than the agent in either portion.

What no man can be, that God is. He alone can take care of the great, without disregarding the little. That he can do so, is his distinctive glory ; nor is it so much matter for our reverent adoration, that he has set the immeasurably distant systems in their spheres, as that, while he watches and controls the vast complication of activity in all, he is not diverted from observing and guiding the path of the humblest human traveller through his pilgrimage of seventy years. No ; the fact that God made and is governing so vast a world, is nothing to make me distrust his readiness to exercise a minute and watchful providence over the affairs of the dwellers on this exceedingly minute division of it. Had he manifested less power, I should much

more reasonably distrust his exercise of such a providence. Because he has done the one,—because he has shown himself the author of works so various, so vast, so admirable,—I am satisfied that he is able, without distraction, to do the other ; to take abundant care, as different circumstances may require, of the welfare and advancement of every race and every being throughout his universe, capable of discipline and of progress.

A point much urged by Paine, as well as by other writers, both ancient and modern, is the existence of discrepancies in the evangelical narrative. Now upon this it is obvious to observe, that circumstantial difference along with essential agreement is one of the prominent conditions of credible testimony. Take ten men who yesterday were present at the same transaction, and you shall find that while the substantial parts of it will be related by all alike, no two of them will agree upon every minute particular, respecting which they may be questioned. So well understood is this, that, if there should be found a punctilious agreement in respect to subordinate matters, it would unavoidably suggest the idea of concert and conspiracy ; the testimony, instead of being confirmed, would be discredited by such a perfect consonance. Paine himself does not hesitate to admit this ; for he says, that “ the contradictions in the books of the New Testament demonstrate two things ; first, that the writers cannot have been eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses of the matters they relate, or they would have related

them without those contradictions, and consequently that the books have not been written by the persons called apostles, who are supposed to have been witnesses of this kind; secondly, that the writers, whoever they were, have not acted in concerted imposition, but each writer, separately and individually for himself, and without the knowledge of the other. The same evidence that applies to prove the one, applies equally to prove both cases; that is, that the books were not written by the men called apostles, and also that they are not a concerted imposition.” \*

But is it not perfectly safe to say, that to give up the idea of concerted imposition, is to abandon the ground of imposture in every shape? Certainly, if there was fraud in the case at all, there was conspiracy in fraud. That the supposition of an attempt at deception of any kind is utterly untenable, I trust has been abundantly proved in a former part of these remarks; but certainly the supposition of such an attempt, is inseparable from the supposition of combination and league. How else, except by understanding that they were confederated together either to publish the truth or to publish a falsehood, is it possible to imagine how the apostles came to teach the same doctrine, to tell substantially the same story, as they have done,— to portray, with consistent lineaments, the unprecedented character of their Master? Let any one take up

\* *Theological Works*, p. 139.

the Gospels with the idea that their authors were deceivers, each proceeding on an independent scheme of his own, and see what degree of success he will have in accommodating the facts to this hypothesis. On this author's own showing, the discrepancies alleged refute the supposition of confederacy in imposture ; then, we have perfect confidence in saying, they refute the supposition of imposture of any kind.

But let us see of what nature these alleged discrepancies are ; and I will take them in the order in which they are brought to view by the writer before us. The first instance produced by him occurs in the genealogies of our Saviour, at the beginning of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. I need not recite the particulars of the contents of these passages. They are sufficiently familiar to my audience. Now I am of opinion that one of these can be shown with a high degree of probability to be the genealogy of Joseph, the other that of Mary ; — the latter being inserted in the Gospel of Luke, who wrote particularly for the use of the Gentile converts of Greece ; the former in that of Matthew, who had especially in view the Jewish Christians, and might properly adapt himself to the ideas of those whose national usages scarcely admitted of the recital of the genealogy of a female, and many of whom, — entertaining, as we know, the opinion that Joseph was the father of Jesus, — might fitly be met on their own ground, by the proof

that, even in that case, Jesus was a descendant of David.

But, passing by a somewhat nice question of criticism,—which, were it sufficiently connected with our present inquiry, I should prefer to treat at large, and with the addition of some thoughts, which seem to me material, but which have not, that I know, attracted notice,—I would ask attention to a brief statement of two considerations.

First; the credibility of either writer, as an original witness to the acts and discourses of Jesus, cannot, from the nature of the case, be involved in his simply adducing an ancient genealogy, whatever view may in other respects be taken of the contents of those lists. It was not,—it could not be,—in any such character, that they pretended to know who were the remote progenitors of Jesus and David, but from the evidence of public or family records.

Secondly; their character as inspired men (in any view of their inspiration) is no more concerned in the correctness of these genealogical lists, than their character as present witnesses. For to suppose their knowledge in the case to have been that of inspiration, and not of record, is to suppose it to have been exactly such as would not at all serve the particular purpose for which the genealogies were produced. That purpose of course was to establish the fact, that Jesus corresponded to the expectation entertained of the Messiah, in the particular of being the Son of David. But to affirm that fact

on the ground of an inspired knowledge, would have been to reverse the necessary order of proceeding. Those whom they addressed would have replied, The proper way of showing a fact of that kind,—a fact which, when shown, is to be one means of proving to us the supernatural commission of your Master, and consequently your own,—is by an appeal to the records. If they do not show it, no pretended inspiration of yours will.

From the necessity of the case, I repeat,—from the very nature of what the evangelists were here proposing to do,—they must be understood as referring to these genealogies, not as the substance of knowledge supernaturally communicated to their own minds, but as what they found registered in the proper documents. These documents,—with whatever other differences,—agreed in declaring Jesus to be of the house of David, which was the point in question. And in this view of the case,—a view, which I see not how any one can gainsay,—the question respecting these genealogies, however in other respects they may be regarded, is shifted from the evangelists to the keepers of the records which they recited. The records may be inexact, and yet the credit of the evangelists, who took them as they were to be had, will be absolutely unimpeached.

“The story,” says our author, going on with his list of discrepancies, “of the angel announcing what the church calls the *immaculate conception*, is not so much as mentioned in the books ascribed

to Mark and John, and is differently related in Matthew and Luke.” \*

“ The story is not so much as mentioned in the book ascribed to John.” But John, according to approved ancient testimonies, wrote with the other Gospels before him, and one of his objects was to record facts which they had omitted ; a statement with which the phenomena of his book extremely well correspond.† “ It is not so much as mentioned in the book ascribed to Mark.” But the Gospel of Mark is much shorter than either of the others ; by necessary consequence not a few things, related by them, are by him passed over ; and he expressly begins his history with the period of our Lord’s public ministry. Certainly, it would be an unheard of thing, to make it a condition of a writer’s credit, that his book should contain every thing embraced in some other, treating of the same general subject. Omissions, — selections of topics and facts, — are not to be tortured into a charge of contradiction ; and, when this is considered, a sufficient answer is supplied to much that has been carelessly said of discrepancies in the Gospels. “ The story is differently related in Matthew and Luke.” Differently, how ? The word is equivocal, and perhaps was chosen for that reason. Not differently, in the sense of inconsistently. One fact is in this instance related by one evangelist ; another, by the other ; the appearance of an angel to Joseph, by Matthew ; to

\* *Theological Works*, p. 131.

† Lardner’s *History of the Apostles*, &c., chap. 9, § 7. (*Works*, Vol. III. p. 227.)

Mary, by Luke. But there is no contrariety between them. So far from it, there is the most complete agreement; and, in a harmonized arrangement of the Gospels, they stand together as each other's complement, if I may so say, in the most natural and striking sequence.

The author of the "Age of Reason" goes on ; "The writer [of Matthew's Gospel] tells us, that Jesus escaped this slaughter [the slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem] because Joseph and Mary were warned by an angel to flee with him into Egypt ; but he forgot to make any provision for John, who was then under two years of age. John, however, who stayed behind, fared as well as Jesus who fled, and therefore the story circumstantially belies itself."\* I reply, that we have no *data* for calculating that John, who was some months older than Jesus, was at this period under two years of age ; and, further, that we have no reason to suppose that John was at this period at Bethlehem, the place to which the massacre was limited. His parents lived in "the hill country," in "a city of Judah," † which has been supposed, — with no particular probability, it is true, — to be Hebron. Bethlehem at all events it was not. Bethlehem would not have been so described.

Again ; "Not any two of these writers agree in reciting, exactly in the same words, the written inscription, short as it is, which they tell us was

\* *Theological Works*, p. 131.

† *Luke*, i. 89.

put over Christ when he was crucified. . . . . The inscription is thus stated in those books.

*Matthew*, — ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’

*Mark*, — ‘The King of the Jews.’

*Luke*, — ‘This is the King of the Jews.’

*John*, — ‘Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.’

We may infer from these circumstances, trivial as they are, that those writers, whoever they were, and in whatever time they lived, were not present at the scene.”\*

I do not think that we can infer any such thing. It surprises me not at all, that the disciples,— had they read with tearful eyes and bursting hearts the words over their dying Master’s cross,— should have reported them afterwards with such a degree of difference as this. But, if we could make that inference, it would not be at all material. John, speaking of himself under the name of “the disciple whom Jesus loved,” is the only one of them who professes to have been present at the scene. The inscription is specified with all the exactness to be expected in such a case, or which historians, writing in good faith, would have been likely to observe. Impostors might have studied a more scrupulous identity of phrase.

Again; “Mark says, he was crucified at the third hour (nine in the morning); and John says, it was the sixth hour (twelve at noon).”† The facts here are altogether mis-stated. What John says, according to the common reading, is, that Jesus was

\* *Theological Works*, pp. 131, 132.

† *Ibid.* p. 132.

hurried away to crucifixion, "about the sixth hour;"\* an expression which intimates to the reader that considerable latitude is used. Also; the text of John is here quite uncertain, the manuscript authority being quite as good, if not better, in favor of the reading, "the third," instead of "the sixth."† Further; my own opinion is, that Mark should be so translated as to be understood, that it was the parting of the garments of Jesus, of which he had spoken in the preceding verse, which took place in the third hour after his crucifixion.

Again; it is said, "The accounts that are given of the circumstances, that they tell us attended the crucifixion, are differently related in those four books."‡ The word "differently" here again covers an ambiguity; for, when the specification comes to be made, no instance is pointed out of inconsistency between the different narratives, but only examples of a greater fulness in the relation of circumstances by one, than by the others.

Once more; the narrative of the resurrection is referred to, as sustaining the same charge.§ But here, as before, it rests on a partially different selection of circumstances by the different writers, each having, as was natural, been led to record most fully those which came most within his personal knowledge, or which for any reason made the strongest impression upon himself. Collected together, they present no difficulty whatever, affecting

\* *John*, xix. 14.

† See Griesbach or Wetstein; *ad loc.*

‡ *Theological Works*, p. 132.

§ *Ibid.* p. 134, *et seq.*

the credibility of the whole or of any one. They admit perfectly well of being combined into one orderly, consistent narrative, which shall embrace them all. This has been done in somewhat different ways by different commentators. The method of the late Dr. Carpenter, as exhibited in a “*Harmony*,” published a few years ago in this city,\* appears to me to present most naturally the whole series of incidents in the succession in which they actually occurred. But, whether one or another be preferred, of three or four different arrangements that have been proposed, is not material. Either will equally with the others serve to show, that no contradiction or incongruity can be pointed out in a comparison of the different particulars of the story; that no part of that story, regarded as a whole, can be proved to conflict with any other.

But the point which Paine has treated at the greatest length, and far the most successfully for his own object, is that very important one of the connexion of the New Testament with the Old. “*The Bible*,” he says, “is the sire of the Testament, and both are called *the word of God*. The Christians read both books; the ministers preach from both books; and this thing, called Christianity, is made up of both.”† And, proceeding upon this thought, he makes large collections of what

\* *A Harmony of the Gospels, on the Plan proposed by Lant Carpenter, LL. D.*

† *Theological Works*, p. 151.

he regards as objectionable matter in the Old Testament; and, presenting it in a point of view to serve his purpose, and assuming that Christianity is responsible for all, concludes that the religion which sustains such things ought not to be referred to a divine origin.

This method of reasoning was not new with this writer. In early times, as we have formerly seen, arguments were sought in the Old Testament, both by Jewish and Gentile unbelievers, wherewith to repel the pretensions of the New. From the first the Jews said, that Jesus of Nazareth did not correspond to the idea of their Messiah, as they had gathered it from the reading of their prophets; the latter being that chiefly of a temporal prince and champion, while the former professed to be only a spiritual deliverer. Such, it is plain, was the chief cause of the aversion of the Jews at the time of the promulgation of our faith. So, as we saw in the proper place, argued Trypho against Justin in the second century; and the incongruity, in this respect, between the Old Testament and the New, was dwelt upon at large by Celsus the Epicurean in the same age, by Porphyry the Platonist in the third century, and by the Emperor Julian in the fourth. With the revival of the controversy in modern times, this objection was revived, and, while it was still the strong-hold of Jewish unbelief, was urged, with much more ability than ever before, by Collins, a hundred years ago. At the same time a different objection to Christianity, de-

rived from the same source, assumed a prominent importance in the discussion. Bolingbroke assailed the authenticity of the whole Old Testament collection, and, with Morgan, Chubb, and others, condemned various parts of its contents, as incredible, unprofitable, and immoral. Voltaire took up the topic, and treated it, for Continental readers, with that exceeding dexterity, of which his peculiar constitution of mind made him capable. Paine succeeded him, and addressed it to readers of the English language ; and it is to this argument, I conceive, that the effects wrought by his book are chiefly, — I might say, almost wholly, — attributable.

In looking forward to that part of our discussion in which this topic has its place, I felt, for a time, no little hesitation as to the manner of dealing with it ; hesitation, arising, not from any suspense of my own mind, which has for several years been wholly made up upon the question, but from an unwillingness to take a ground, while defending our common faith, which might give pain to any believer. But I could not be excused for avoiding the question. A calm frankness is in every such case the least offensive, as well as the honorable, course ; and I shall use in relation to this point the same unreserved candor which I have observed upon every other. The point is of the utmost importance. In my opinion, it lies at the basis of most of the current objections to Christianity, which, this point disposed of, would almost cease to be

heard. But I know not the book, in our own, or in any other language, which treats it in a manner to give satisfaction to a reasonable Christian or a reasonable unbeliever. I cannot but regard it as having been hitherto the subject of a shallow criticism on the part both of friends and of foes. Other objections, famous in their day, have one by one been disposed of, and cease to present themselves, at least with the same confident front as formerly. The placing of this upon its proper footing, is, if I do not err, the one thing, which has not yet been done, and which needs to be done, I will not say for the completion, but for the adjustment and brightening, of the then continuous, firm, and tenacious chain of the Christian evidences.

These remarks premised, I proceed to give a brief outline of my views respecting the actual state of the case. In common with most other Christians, I confidently believe the religion of the Old Testament to be of supernatural divine origin, as well as the religion of the New. But I do not find reason to attribute to all the contents of the Old Testament the character and sense which have been generally ascribed to them; nor, in some particulars, can I understand, in the same manner as has been common, that testimony to the Old Testament, contained in the New, which has been regarded as imposing on the latter so complete and peculiar a responsibility for the former.

As to the New Testament, I do not dispute the principle, — on the contrary I contend for it, —

that its testimony to the character and sense of the Old, — whatever that testimony may be found to be, — is to be taken as decisive of the question. But I ask what its testimony is. And I find it to be this. First; the New Testament recognises Moses, the founder of the Jewish system, as a miraculously accredited messenger from God, and his religion, accordingly, as a supernatural divine institution. Secondly; it recognises the existence, in the Old Testament records, of true and supernaturally suggested predictions of the coming Messiah. But the inspiration of all the parts, or of all the authors, of that collection, the authenticity of all the books, the correctness of the representations of all the events spoken of in the Old Testament, whether past, present, or future, to the writers, — these I cannot find that the New Testament does anywhere avouch. I know that the critics speak of a “Canon of the Old Testament,” which the New Testament, by that authority of its own to which I bow as much as any man, declares to be authoritative. But I have sought in vain in the New Testament for any declaration of that import.

With these general views of the testimony of the New Testament concerning the Old, I take up the Old Testament itself. And first I address myself to that part of it, which is said to be the work of the great founder of the institution, — the Pentateuch, — the Law, — the five books of Moses. And on a careful examination of those books, I do not find in them any thing, which, fairly interpreted,

discredits, but, on the contrary, very much that corroborates that testimony, handed down from the remotest generations of the Jewish people, which refers those books to Moses as their author. Proceeding to a further investigation, I arrive at the conclusion, that the religion they teach, and the institutions they prescribe, considered, as of course they should be, with relation to the existing time and circumstances, were such as it was eminently worthy of the divine wisdom and goodness to establish. I do not willingly overlook any objection which has been urged against them. I carefully weigh whatever has been said to their prejudice, in respect to the alleged insignificance of some parts of the revelation, and the unreasonableness and even unrighteousness of others; and my conclusion in favor of the pretension of Moses and his religion to supernatural authority remains unshaken, and is strengthened by the more careful examination to which every objection leads. If this conclusion should be found to be correct, then the objections of Voltaire, Paine, and others, to the Old Testament, are untenable as far as respects the Mosaic institution, strictly so called.

But there is another part of the composition of Moses, besides what relates to his own mission and the transactions of his own time. In the book of Genesis, evidently a sort of Preface to those which follow, events are referred to, belonging to much earlier periods than that of the writer. In the detail of these, he has been under-

stood by readers to assume a new character,—that of a general historian,—and to relate history, ancient, some of it exceedingly ancient, even to him, with the advantage of a claim upon the implicit assent of his readers, derived from the peculiar supernatural qualifications with which he had been endowed for his office of a messenger of religious truth from God. But a difficulty in assenting to that claim,—rather, in supposing Moses to have made that claim,—a difficulty altogether independent of any reluctance to yield to it if really made,—presents itself to the reader at the outset. He observes that, repeatedly, two accounts of substantially the same event are presented in immediate succession, which two accounts partly are mere repetitions, the one of the other, and partly, in some of their circumstances, mere mutual contradictions; contradictions too, so express and evident, that it is impossible they could have escaped the writer's notice.

Could Moses write thus, in the character of an historian? If we assume him to have written in Genesis as a supernaturally inspired historian, which statement of his shall we accept as infallible,—for we cannot possibly accept both,—that the universe was made in seven days, as is said in the first chapter of Genesis, or that it was made in one, as is declared in the second; that the animals went into the ark of Noah, the clean by sevens, and the not clean by twos, as is related near the beginning of the seventh chapter, or the clean and the unclean

indiscriminately by pairs, according to the representation a little further on?

Such observations put one upon the inquiry, whether, in the composition of Genesis, Moses is not to be considered as aiming at the object of his other labors in the establishment of his religion and its institutions, rather than as entering the different province of an annalist of the distant ages.

This idea acquires confirmation from some further noticeable facts. A careful comparison of the passages in Genesis, which, as has been remarked, now merely repeat, and now expressly contradict one another, shows them to be respectively characterized by certain remarkable peculiarities of phraseology, in the use of which they are alike consistent with themselves, and distinguished each from the other.\* From this we gather (may I not say with certainty?) that the fragments in question are the productions of different writers; in other words, that this part of the work of Moses (for in an important sense it is still his) is a compilation.

But why should he compile statements which do not agree together? What object could have induced him to that course? He could not take it, in what was intended for a continuous consistent history. He would then have reconciled the diversities of statement; or he would have preferred one; or he would have omitted both. In what

\* For a full treatment of this subject, see the author's *Academical Lectures, &c.* Vol. II.

kind of composition could he do it? I reply; In a composition of a didactic character; in an argument. Here such a method would be entirely in place. And a composition of that character I take the book of Genesis (particularly the first eleven chapters) to be; substantially an argument, though not cast in an artificial form. And the great heads of that argument I take to be three, as follows.

When he is at pains to relate, in the adduction of such authorities as ancient history, accessible to him, supplied, that Abram, Isaac, and Jacob had successively had a divine promise of the land of Canaan for their posterity; \* that they all successively took actual possession by pitching their tent in one place, digging a well in another, buying a tomb in a third, and building an altar in a fourth; † that Abram and Lot came of old from the east, and established themselves together in the region, but that Lot had left it by a peaceable partition with Abram, renouncing thereby all future claim to it for himself, and by consequence for his posterity, the Moabites and Ammonites; ‡ that Abram, thus enjoying it in undivided property, dismissed Ishmael and his other sons from it that it might become the sole inheritance of Isaac and his sons; § that, of Isaac's sons, Esau withdrew to Edom, leaving the exclusive territorial claim of

\* *Gen. xiii. 15; xxvi. 3; xxxv. 12.*

† *Ibid. E. g. xii. 7, 8; xxiii. 16; xxvi. 19; xxxv. 7.*

‡ *Ibid. xiii. 1 — 12.*

§ *Ibid. xxii. 21; xxv. 6.*

Jacob, and, thus, of Jacob's posterity, unchallenged ; \*—when Moses, I say, collects the ancient authorities, which, with whatever minor varieties of statement, agree in these leading facts, I understand him, writing as he did in the wilds of Arabia, as then and there addressing a virtual argument to his people to the effect, that to them, and them alone, by virtue of divine gift and of rightful inheritance, belonged that land of Canaan, which he was inviting them to invade.

Again ; when I find him collecting unconnected statements of sacrifices having been anciently practised, as in the case of several of the patriarchs ; † of circumcision, ‡ of a payment of tithes, as in the case of Melchisedec, § and of a distinction between clean and unclean beasts having been recognised in the language of a fragment of a primeval age, || — and this list might be largely increased, but it would be by a slow induction of particulars, — I understand him as virtually addressing to the people, to whom a law had just been given upon Mount Sinai, considerations drawn from the example of the venerated ancients, and designed to conciliate their assent to onerous and unwelcome provisions of that law.

Once more ; in that earliest part of his book, where he has placed together different accounts, existing in his age, of the beginning of human

\* *Gen.* xxxiii. 16.

† *Ibid.* E. g. viii. 20; xv. 9; xxxv. 14.

‡ *Ibid.* xvii. 23.

§ *Ibid.* xiv. 20.

|| *Ibid.* vii. 2, 8.

things, I regard him as intending substantially to say to his people, in exact consistency with his religious office ; You see what narratives have come down to our day of the events of the earliest times. They contradict each other, indeed, in subordinate circumstances, and therefore cannot be circumstantially true. But this is not what concerns us. Differing as they do in other particulars, and thereby showing themselves to be of independent origin, in these two all-important particulars they perfectly agree. They agree in representing the Creator of the world, first, as being one, and, secondly, as exercising a watchful providence and a moral government. One God created the world, whether he created it in one manner or another. God's providence took care of men's welfare, and his omniscience and justice took notice of their sins. You thereby see, that those cardinal doctrines, taught only, in this age, in my religion, and rejected by the depraving idolatries which surround us, were the approved faith of the simple and innocent infancy of the world.

This account of the book of Genesis, if it be esteemed correct, will meet all that has been said by unbelievers of the incredibility of statements concerning the creation, and the condition of the primeval age. Moses did not present himself as an authority on those subjects. Had he designed to do so, he would not have produced authorities, which, in their details, only nullify one another. He produced them only to appeal to their singular

agreement, in the midst of other discordance, in respect to certain matters which it did concern him to enforce.

To me, Moses is the revealer of the Jewish religion, the “teacher sent from God,” as Jesus was on a still higher errand; and the Law of Moses, in the Pentateuch, contains the authoritative record of that faith as the New Testament does of the faith of Jesus. What little I am now to say upon the later books, may, from the difference of the topics it presents, be conveniently arranged under two divisions.

As to the later historical books, I deny that Christianity has in any way made itself, or can in any reason be held, responsible for their contents, in point of historical correctness, or moral influence, or any thing else. With my views, the unbeliever may expose the (to say the least) extremely faulty character of David or of Solomon, or he may dispute the fact of the stopping of the sun in the days of Joshua, or the carrying away of the gates of Gaza on the shoulders of Samson, and he will disturb my faith in Christianity no more, than if he should assail the fame of any other prince, or dispute the reality of any other alleged extraordinary event, in any history whatever. I cannot consent to admit that Christianity shall stand or fall with the truth, or reasonableness, or usefulness,—whether these be greater or less,—of the contents, for instance, of the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, the Kings, and Chronicles, so called, till

a much better argument than I have ever yet seen has been produced, establishing an intimate connexion between the two. I cannot find that Christianity, by the lips of its author, or the writings of his servants, ever avowed that connexion.

As I read the New Testament, it has left the question respecting the origin and the authority of those books an open one. And, looking at it as an open question, and applying to all appropriate sources of information, I do not find that any known body of the Jews, even in our Saviour's time, nor for some generations later, were agreed upon any collection of writings which in any sense could be called an "Old Testament Canon,"—though, if they had been, in that comparatively modern age, it would have been but a feeble basis for any argument; and I do find, on the other hand, the very important fact, that the Sadducees, a large, and the most learned, portion of the nation,—not to add the Caraïtes also, of whom we know less,—did, in that age, make a wide distinction between the Law, properly so called,—the Pentateuch,—and all other books. Again; looking at those later historical books themselves, one by one, and at the best evidence we have respecting their dates, it appears, that, in no instance of those previous to the captivity, can we determine with a reasonable degree of probability who was its author; and that, on the other hand, they were, in every instance, the production of some writer living at a time con-

siderably subsequent to that of the events which they record, and so writing, not only (to us, at least) anonymously, but without any thing of the authority of a contemporaneous witness. If these views concerning the historical books after the Pentateuch be admitted as just, we are provided with a very ready answer to Paine, without disputing the truth of his extravagant language, where he speaks of "the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled." \*

The rest of the Old Testament collection consists of what are commonly called *the prophetical*, and other poetical, books. With regard to these, the established opinion is, that their writers, or most of them, were supernaturally endowed with a knowledge of future events. As to far the greater portion of the contents of those books, it is obvious to the most cursory inspection, that they do not relate to the future in any manner. But this, I grant, does not at all forbid the idea that other portions of them do. If the writers of those books enjoyed the endowment of supernatural foreknowledge commonly attributed to them, that fact must become known to us in one or the other of two ways; either from declarations of the New Testament to that effect, or from evidence furnished by their own compositions in our possession.

\* *Theological Works*, p. 40.

As to declarations of the New Testament to that effect, it is a mistake to suppose that any such can be found. The fact that the New Testament called them *prophets* is not at all to the purpose. The idea that the title *prophet* necessarily denotes, that the person designated by it possesses a miraculous knowledge of the future, is altogether arbitrary and unfounded. The primitive sense of the word *prophet* is a *speaker*, or *preacher*. Thus Aaron was the prophet, or spokesman, of Moses, because it was known that he could “speak well.”\* A prophet, as such, may speak of the present or the past, as well as of the future ; and, when he speaks of the future, he may do it with supernatural knowledge, or without.

The New Testament, as I have before said, does recognise supernatural predictions of Jesus in the Old. But, if supernatural predictions of Jesus occur, as I understand them to do, in the books of the inspired lawgiver Moses, then that condition of the New Testament declarations is met, without the necessity of supposing supernatural foreknowledge to have been vouchsafed to any other individual under the Old dispensation. The New Testament also declares, that the Messiah was spoken of by the prophets.† But how spoken of? He was spoken of also, as occasion prompted, by every uninspired Jew, who lived in the prophets’ time. Every Jew, after the age of Moses, looked for him,

\* *Exodus*, iv. 14.

† *John*, i. 45.

whom Moses had said that the Lord God would in due time raise up, “like unto himself.”\* To be spoken of, is one thing. To be spoken of in the expression of miraculous foreknowledge, is another ; and in this latter way, as I read the New Testament, it does not declare that Jesus was spoken of by the prophets after Moses. In my recent Lecture upon the argument of Collins, I showed, I trust, to the satisfaction of my hearers, that forms of language, with which the New Testament writers frequently introduce quotations from the Old, cannot be taken as indicating, that it was events long ago supernaturally foretold, which in their time had come to pass ; and certainly it is a remarkable fact, that the passage in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, which has always been regarded as more favorable than any other in the later prophets to the hypothesis of a supernatural knowledge of the future on the part of its author, and which was the only one that the sagacious Paley ventured to vindicate as a specimen of that kind of argument, is never adduced in the New Testament in that peculiar and prominent application, for which, in the opinion of this writer and of others, it is so singularly suited.

Finally ; he who maintains that those writers pretended to a miraculous insight into the future, will find, unless I greatly err, that he does them serious injustice ; for, building his interpretation of their language on that basis, he will not be able to show an instance, in which the pretension he in-

\* *Deut.* xviii. 15.

juriously ascribes to them was clearly borne out by the subsequent fact; while he will find not a few instances, in which their words, if understood so differently from their real, original, honest purport, were belied by later history. They wrote in perfect good faith. They put forward no unsustained pretension. It is only their erroneous interpreters that expose them to the charge.

This theory, if sustained, furnishes an answer to all that was urged by Paine, in his treatise entitled “An Examination of the Passages in the New Testament quoted from the Old, and called Prophecies concerning Jesus Christ,”—a posthumous work, which he is said to have intended for one division of a Third Part of his unfinished “Age of Reason,” in answer to Watson, Bishop of Llandaff. It meets what was urged, in that work, by Paine, as it has been by other writers, to show that the supernatural foreknowledge ascribed by Christians to the later prophets was falsely pretended. Christians have ascribed it to the later prophets. But the later prophets set up no such pretension for themselves; nor did the writers of the New Testament set it up for them.

I am fully sensible, at what a disadvantage I throw out these hints. To illustrate them properly, to protect them against misapprehension, and to unfold their details and bearings, would require a review of the literary history of some of the Old Testament books, and a minute criticism, one by one, of all the passages, both in the Old and New

Testament,— by no means, however, so numerous as may be imagined,— which at first sight have the appearance of conflicting with the representation I have made; and this would be a work for several lectures instead of for a part of one. Briefly as they are now presented, I have that confidence in their correctness, which arises from knowing them to have been long and anxiously pondered, and patiently matured. The subject was once one of great perplexity and uneasiness to my own mind. The conclusions, at which I eventually arrived, have not, for several years, experienced any change as to their principles; but successive investigations, year after year, in the course of which I have examined the whole text of the Old and of the New Testament, in the original languages, many times over, with particular relation to this point, have but given me increased confidence in the correctness of those principles, and shown me the consistency with them of every passage in the Bible, which formerly, by the force of education and habit, had presented itself to me under a different aspect. Attachment to favorite studies may have biassed me; but I will not disguise my conviction, that the one great service which now remains to be done for the credit of Christianity, is to consist in a just exposition of the contents and authority of the several Old Testament books, in order to relieve Christianity from those objections against it, of which the Old Testament, as now regarded, is the source; — objections originating in a vicious mode of interpretation,

by Christians themselves, which was introduced into the Church as early, at least, as the time of Justin Martyr, and which has unhappily been permitted to have authority down to the present day.

In the next Lecture I shall treat of Infidelity in Germany.

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## LECTURE XXIII.

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### INFIDELITY IN GERMANY.

My audience are aware, that it is but recently that Germany, a country now unprecedentedly fertile in writers, has possessed a literature of its own. Its infidel opinions, as far as they were derived from books, were at first, for the most part, introduced from abroad. The labors of its earliest Reformers had terminated in the secure establishment, within its limits, of the Protestant church, which, regulated by the Lutheran and Calvinistic creeds and symbols, had assumed the order, and come to be affected with something of that coldness which is the besetting vice, of an establishment. A lifeless dogmatism is complained of as having become the spirit of the time; and doctrines, forms, and polemics threatened to supplant the consideration due only to a religious life.

In this state of things, one hundred and fifty years after Luther, appeared a practical reformer, Philip Jacob Spener, who may be compared, as to his tone

of thought, and (with some propriety) as to the nature of his labors, to Fenelon or to Wesley. He urged the claims of a spiritual, personal, practical religion, in opposition to mere correctness of belief, and observance of formalities ; and the effect of his labors, and of those of a large portion of the clergy who became his adherents, or sympathized with his views, was to diffuse to a great extent, among the people at large, a religion of more sentiment and warmth, and more stimulating to the imagination, than had hitherto prevailed ; while, on the other hand, such as, by constitution or some other cause, were especially apprehensive of mystical and fanatical tendencies in religion, were led, by the common influences of controversy, to enclose themselves still more strictly within the limits of a precise, dogmatical, technical faith. There was little that could properly be called intellectual action, on either side, upon the subject. On the one, feeling was the great prompter. On the other, there was not much that went beyond logical exposition and defence of opinions and institutions of the Church, which were understood to have been authoritatively determined at the age of the Reformation.

The first real activity of the mind upon the subjects of which we are speaking may, I think, be regarded as having been transferred from the circles of philosophical disputation ; though I do not perceive, that, at this early period, the influence of any particular school of philosophy upon religious opinion can be distinctly traced. The applications

made by Leibnitz of his philosophical theory to that of religion, and his animadversions upon doctrines of Locke and Bayle, only went to confirm views unanimously entertained in Germany by the religious parties. With the system of Wolf, which succeeded to that of Leibnitz, and bore sway in Germany till the middle of the last century, it was different. He was at much pains to show the consistency of the evidences and the doctrines of Christianity with a sound philosophy, and represented it as a prominent excellence of his own scheme, that it rendered this service to that religion. But others, particularly the theologians of the school of Spener, charged him with having done it a wrong in stripping it unduly of its peculiar character of mystery, and with having favored that encroachment of deistical opinions, which he had professed himself so anxious to obstruct.

At all events, the taste for philosophical investigation and inquiry, which had been cultivated in Germany by the writings of Leibnitz, Wolf, and their disciples, naturally extended itself to the region of theology. There were as yet no native assailants of Christianity ; but the literary reputation of England was at its height, and among others the works of Tindal, Collins, Morgan, Woolston, and Bolingbroke found their way into German hands ; and when, in 1740, Frederick the Second, called the Great, ascended the throne of Prussia, the reputation of that extraordinary person, as well as the more direct influence of the policy of his adminis-

tration, favored, through nearly forty years, the spread of the infidel principles to which he was attached. The harsh treatment experienced by Frederick in his youth had inspired him with a disgust against the religion to which his father was a stern devotee ; and, when he had become his own master, he made no secret of his aversion. He invited the French atheists to his court, and lived with them on terms of familiar friendship ; and that perfect liberty of speech and of the press, which he as freely permitted upon religious, as he peremptorily forbade it upon political questions, was well known to be used most satisfactorily to himself, when Christianity, in all its forms, was made the object of assault and ridicule. His constitution, as well as the unfortunate circumstances of his early life, had something to do with this propensity. Never did greatness, in a civilized age, appear in a coarser and more unspiritual form, than in that of the Prussian hero.

John Christopher Edelmann, of Weissenfels, may, I suppose, be properly named as the first German infidel writer of considerable note. His works, of which the earliest was published in the year 1735, exhibit him as a mystic and Pantheist, after the manner of more recent manifestations of the German mind ; but his particular objections to the authority of Christianity present no points of view which had not been anticipated by some other writer. In respect to its records, he sympathized with the crude historical skepticism of Bolingbroke ;

and, as to its claim to reception as a rule of life, he stood on much the same ground as Morgan. He speaks of the sacred books with respect, as containing much truth and wisdom on the highest subjects of human thought, but denies that their authors wrote with the benefit of any supernatural illumination. The New Testament he will have to be a collection of the time of Constantine the Great, and to have been since subject to much corruption. Miracles, in consistency with his Pantheistic principles, he holds to be impossible, since, if God and Nature are the same, of course nothing supernatural can ever be. I do not resume the consideration of these doctrines, which have all received attention in their place.

Edelmann died in 1767. Seven years after, began the most famous of the avowed attacks on Christianity, which that country has yet produced, in a series of papers called "The Wolfenbüttel Fragments." The authorship of these essays, ostensibly found in the great library at Wolfenbüttel, and published, from time to time, by Lessing its keeper, has not, that I know, been traced with certainty; but it is commonly ascribed to Reimar, a Professor at Hamburg, who had before become favorably known by several publications, especially by some in defence of natural religion against the French atheism. The distinctive doctrine of the "Fragments" is, that the enterprise of Jesus was a merely selfish and worldly one, in the accomplishment of which he was frustrated, and lost his life

as the forfeit of his temerity ; that, excited by the prevailing expectations of the nation, as we know that some others of the time were, whom the New Testament calls “false Christs”, he had proposed to himself to organize an insurrection among his countrymen, to place himself at its head, and so to seat himself on the restored throne of David ; that, to this end, he had entered into a conspiracy with John the Baptist, who presented himself as his forerunner ; that, when he supposed a sufficient impression to have been produced upon the public mind to warrant an open movement, he made a public entrance into the Holy City at the time of the Passover, and by words and deeds avowed his purpose ; that, not meeting with the expected support, he withdrew into a retirement, where he was apprehended ; that he was subsequently put to death ; and that his followers, in this emergency, bethought themselves of a new method of taking advantage of the influence, which, in his company, they had acquired over a portion of the people, and gave out that the object had always been to establish, not a worldly, but a spiritual dominion ; in which pretension, by force of zeal and perseverance, they succeeded, to the extent of establishing, in the civilized nations, that religious institution, which survives to our time.\*

\* The above is the doctrine of the “Fragment” on *The Design of Jesus and his Disciples*, which appeared in 1778. The titles of others, of earlier date, were, *On Toleration of Deists*, *On Decrying Reason*, *On the Impossibility of a Revelation offering Reasonable Grounds of Belief to All Men*, *On the History of Christ’s Resurrection*.

This easy theory made its converts, and had its day, though at present only noticeable as belonging to the history of the subject. The attention it attracted is, I conceive, readily accounted for by the consideration, that, whereas the general and vague charge of imposture, the natural resource of resolute unbelief, had been repeatedly made, and, from its very vagueness, had afforded little satisfaction as a solution of the problem, here was a specification of the nature, object, and manner of the imposture affirmed. This was certainly enough to impart interest to the scheme. It became a subject of curiosity to see how far the recorded facts, by which the hypothesis undertook to sustain itself, could be shown to correspond with and confirm it. And the theory in fact lived long enough for that inquiry to be made, and scarcely any longer.

The method of maintaining it was, from the conditions of the case, a criticism which aimed to show, that the conduct of Jesus, as described in the Gospels, accorded with the supposition of the worldly views ascribed to him. But the furthest it could advance, in this undertaking, was to produce certain facts, which, taken by themselves, were reconcilable with that supposition. When it attempted to proceed further, in either of the two other necessary steps of the argument, — namely, to show either that any part of the recorded conduct of Jesus was inconsistent with the religious character of his enterprise, as commonly understood, or that all parts of it would admit the supposition of

an ambitious political scheme,—then it doomed itself to a signal failure.

Is it said, for instance, that, when Jesus at one time fed a multitude with great publicity, and, at another, said to a cured leper, “See thou tell no man,” he adopted expedients suitable to an adventurer, who now would make the most of his notoriety, and now must take care of his personal safety,—or that, when he rode into the capital city with a train of followers, and afterwards, meeting with coldness and opposition, withdrew, he did what would have been likely to be done by a disappointed and alarmed insurgent,—we have no hesitation in granting that this, in each case, is one of the constructions, which, if we knew no more, would bear to be put upon his conduct. Of course, in the history of Jesus, as of others, we are to expect to find single actions, which we shall interpret in one way or in another, according to the guidance we obtain from other parts of his character and conduct. That is not at all the question. The questions are, to repeat it, whether, in all that is recorded of Jesus, there is any one thing which contradicts the view of those, who regard him as a supernaturally endowed messenger from God for the religious benefit of men; and whether, on the other hand, there are not things, and that in abundance, which will absolutely admit no other explanation.

The criticism which will establish either of these propositions will be to the purpose. But it is ob-

vious to remark, that it will involve the argument that Jesus and his apostles,—or, at least, Jesus *or* his apostles,—were concerned in an imposture. In order to the sustaining of any such specific allegation of fraudulent design as that to which we are now attending, it is manifestly indispensable that the positive proof of integrity, adduced in behalf of the persons concerned, should be refuted or brought into just suspicion. The very object that we have, in settling the point, by the decisive weight of the considerations formerly produced, that the supposition of imposture is absolutely untenable, is to preclude the idea, not only of fraud in general, but of fraud in every possible particular form and manner. If the arguments were good, by which it was undertaken to show that the founders of our religion were, beyond all contradiction, sincere and honest, then every imaginable scheme of dishonesty alike is shown to be alien from their purpose. Whoever will convict them of some specified treacherous design, must first find some flaw in the reasoning which professes to settle the question of their integrity. To guess what wicked purpose they might have entertained, supposing them to be capable of entertaining any, is altogether irrelevant, till the possibility, consistently with acknowledged facts, of supposing them capable of entertaining any, has first been made to appear.

The “Wolfenbüttel Fragments” constituted the last, as well as the first, considerable German work, in which, upon deistical grounds, the authority of the

Christian revelation was professedly and manfully assailed. "From that time," says a German historian, "writings against Christianity made continually less impression, and appeared less frequently. One cause of this was, that it had become manifest, that by such writings nothing would be accomplished against the substance of Christianity, its standing as a public institution of religion, or the character of its founder. Another was, that a coldness and carelessness in relation to it had become generally diffused, and that Naturalism, along with a certain indifference to its historical claims, was continually on the increase among the theologians of Germany."\*

An analysis of the character of this singular people, in order to explain the influences that have brought them to what I regard as the altogether false and untenable position, in respect to religion, which they at present occupy, would be a task, even were I competent to its proper execution, of too great extent to be undertaken in connexion with an argument, with which, after all, it has not the closest relations. But a few statements respecting the recent course of opinion in a community, in which opinion fluctuates with an altogether unparalleled and unapproached facility and levity, may afford some aid towards an elucidation of what will still require to be set down as a series of the most extraordinary phenomena in the history of extravagances of the human mind.

\* Staedlin, *Geschichte der Theologischen Wissenschaften*, Th. II. s. 457.

The mathematico-metaphysical system of the Wolfian philosophy, which succeeded to, as it much resembled, that of Leibnitz, received its death-blow in its native country, at the hand of the new Transcendental Theory, the theory of Kant. Of this, in its merely metaphysical, or its technical, features, it does not belong to our present purpose to speak. But the skepticism of Kant,— I use the word in its philosophical and comprehensive sense,— was not less thorough-going, while it was much more systematic and consistent with itself, than that of Hume, whose speculations, to use Kant's own language, “first interrupted his dogmatical slumber, and gave a wholly different direction to his inquiries in the field of speculative philosophy.”\* The distinctive principle of Kant's theory is, that truth is to be found only in the field of experience, that all ideas not obtained through the senses are beyond the apprehension of the human mind, and that the attempt to seize them does but plunge it into an inextricable maze of contradiction. “All synthetical *à priori* propositions,” he says, “are nothing but the elements of possible experience, and can never be referred to things as they really are, but only to phenomena as objects of experience.”† From this it follows, that all our knowledge is *subjective*, as the Germans call it, and that we can never know things as they are, but only as they

\* *Prolegomena zu einer jeden Künftigen Metaphysik, u. s. f.* s. 13.

† *Ibid.* p. 102.

seem to us. Truth, according to this scheme, has not only not yet been reached ; it never can be.

The inference in respect to convictions of religious truth,—or rather the application to them of this theory, developed in Kant's great work, entitled the “Critique of Pure Reason,”—was too plain to admit of any question. As the ideas of God and duty are not derived directly from the senses, there not only was not,—there could not be,—any proof of the real existence of either. This was of course at once remarked ; and Kant, who professed his own belief in both, labored, in a later treatise, the “Critique of Practical Reason,” to supply the defect, and to point out in the moral nature that foundation for the belief in things unseen and eternal, which the speculative reason could not supply. But this attempt has been generally regarded, both by friends and foes, as a mere excrescence upon, and incongruity with, his system.

The “Critique of Pure Reason” was published in the year 1781. Fichte, a disciple and friend of its author, is thought by some of his friends to have added “the key-stone of the arch.”\* What we call *God*, according to Fichte, is not a personal existence, but “a moral principle of arrangement in the Universe, a notion to which the *I* lifts itself by means of its consciousness of being controlled, in the exercise of its freedom, by the idea of duty.”†

\* Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, Chap. 9, (Vol. I. p. 94. Edit. New York, 1817.)

† Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie*, § 395 (s. 501.)

“According to Fichte,” says Cousin, in his “Introduction to the History of Philosophy,” “God is nothing but the subject of thought conceived as absolute; he is therefore still the *I* [that is, the individual who contemplates him]. But, as it is repugnant to human thought, that the *I* of man, which might indeed be transferred into Nature, should be imposed upon God, Fichte distinguishes between a two-fold *I*; the one phenomenal, namely the *I* which each of us represents; the other itself the substance of the *I*, namely, God himself. God is the absolute *I*.”\* I do not pretend to attach ideas to all this, though part of it is but too intelligible. But I give it in the words of the French writer, who has been esteemed the clearest expositor of the system.

The Fichtean philosophical fashion of the day gave place, before long, to the kindred but different one of Schelling, to whose yet more lofty genius, in the opinion of his admirers, “we owe the completion, and the most important victories, of this revolution in philosophy.”† Fichte, notwithstanding the prevailing language of his theory, had shrunk from the naked statement of that result of it, which goes to the annihilation of every thing in the universe independent of the cognitive subject, and had pretended to point out some shadowy

\* *Introduction, &c.*, Lecture 12. (p. 398.) The translator (H. G. Linberg) of this work, finds cause to say, — not ironically, but in sober statement, — “Fichte has, in arriving at this point, indeed reached the very summit of the pyramid of human science.” (p. 454. Edit. Boston. 1832.)

† Coleridge, *ubi supra*, p. 97.

distinction between the thinker and his thought. Schelling, pursuing the idea, that science ought to repose on the original unity of that which knows and that which is known, "arrived at the system of the *absolute identity* of the subject and object, or the system of the *indifference of the different*, in which consists the being of the absolute, that is, God."\* According to him, "The Absolute (which often also is called *The Divine*, or simply *God*) is neither finite nor infinite, neither real nor imaginary, neither being nor knowledge, neither object nor subject, neither nature nor spirit. But it is that wherein all these antitheses, all distinction and variety, are put away. It is the absolute being and knowing in complete unity; the absolute indifference of all difference; or the absolute identity of the real and the ideal. It is at once One and Manifold, or the absolute One and All."†

In quoting this jargon, I do not profess to understand it. It is essentially, I conceive, no subject for intelligence. But let us make another attempt with the help of the words of an English writer, who was describing it with no unfriendly design. In a sketch of Schelling's philosophy, ascribed to the eminent Scottish metaphysician Sir William Hamilton, it is said, "In the act of knowledge, which, after Fichte, Schelling calls the Intellectual Intuition, there exists no distinction of subject and

\* Tennemann, ubi supra, § 399. (s. 510.)

† Krug, *Allgemeines Handwörterbuch der Philosophischen Wissenschaften*, Band 3, p. 593.

object,—no contrast of knowledge and existence. All difference is lost in absolute indifference, all plurality in absolute unity. The intuition itself, reason, and the absolute, are identical. The absolute exists only as known by reason, and reason knows only as being itself the absolute.”\* Of course, this system sacrifices human individuality, as well as individual divine existence; and a further consequence is, that there can be no future existence of the individual human soul. The philosophy of Schelling knows no future life for man, except one, in which the attributes of the soul are absorbed again into the universal mass of being; “a kind of immortality,” well observes Madame de Staël,† which sadly resembles death, since physical death itself is nothing but universal nature reclaiming the gifts she had made to the individual.”†

This revived form of the old Oriental pantheism,—or atheism, for, as to the choice of the name, it is unimportant,—was destined to undergo one further improvement, or, as I should perhaps better phrase it, to advance one further step in respect to explicit avowal of its character. Of Hegel, the successor of Fichte in his Professorship at Berlin, the “Conversations-Lexicon,” the popular Encyclopædia of Germany, says, that, “in contradistinction from the subjective idealism, to which Fichte had been brought by Kant, and from the objective idealism of Schelling, the theory of Hegel takes the

\* *Edinburgh Review*, Vol. L. p. 208.

† *De l’Allemagne*, Partie 3e. Chap. 7e. (Tome II. p. 272 Edit. Paris, 1835.)

ground of an absolute idealism.”\* According to Hegel, the only real existence consists of ideas.† This is true of God, as much as of any other existence. “The being of God,”—these are the intelligible words of one of his distinguished disciples and expounders, Marheineke,—“is nothing whatever except the determination, or knowledge, of that being.”‡ Says another, Rixner, “The knowledge of the absolute identity of God and the universe, this is Reason.”‡ But the pupils went not at all beyond the master; rather, if possible, the reverse was true. Says Hegel, expressing some reluctance to announce the conclusion, by reason of its paradoxical appearance, but still asseverating his perfect sincerity, “Being and not being, something and nothing, are the same.”‡ There is no exception, of course, made for the Source of being. With God it is, as with all else which has been supposed to exist. And lest any uncertainty should be left as to the legitimate character of this corollary, a writer just now quoted has these words; “In this universal indeterminateness, God is the unintelligent, the steady, absolute unity of what is and what is not, and every thing, which can be affirmed of God, can just as much be denied.”‡ In plain English words, the proposition, which asserts a God, is an insoluble, unmeaning contradiction.

\* Band V. s. 142.

† Krug, *ubi supra*, B. II. s. 374.

‡ I take these quotations from the Boston reprint (pp. 28—30) of a learned article on “Transcendentalism” in the “Princeton Review” for January, 1839.

These are some of the great names of the successive recent schools of German metaphysics, to which we sometimes hear the sane and sober Anglo-Saxon mind invited to resort for instruction. The understandings, which were capable of being attracted and beguiled by such a philosophy, were of course subject to be infected by it in respect to its applications to theology in general, and to Christianity in particular ; and while, on the one hand, many, adopting far the more consistent course, have, in attaching themselves to these doctrines, abandoned the idea of any reconciliation of them with Christianity, in others the most extraordinary hybrid unions have taken place, between the profession of them, and of what has still preferred to call itself by the name of faith in the Gospel.

But, while what has been briefly described was the course of opinion in the department of metaphysical science, changes in the same country, in respect to the doctrines and methods of the science and art of Biblical criticism, as of course they were to a great extent the effect, were also, to some extent, the cause, of changes of opinion respecting the authority of Christianity, and, keeping pace with these latter, serve in some degree to indicate them from step to step. The long-received principles of interpretation of the sacred books had been expounded in a more methodical, precise, and satisfactory developement, and with some qualifications and improvements, by John Augustus Ernesti of Leipzig, in his work in Latin, entitled “Prepar-

ation [or Education] of the New Testament Interpreter," first published in 1761, a judicious and useful treatise, which still holds a high place among manuals of the kind. Ernesti's fundamental doctrine of interpretation, — obvious enough, certainly, yet requiring, as experience has shown, to be enforced, — was, that, in the New Testament as in other books, the expositor's business was to look for the one meaning intended to be expressed by the writer, — a meaning which he called by the different names of the *literal, grammatical, logical, or historical* sense ; and that, as the authors of the New Testament must have intended, like the writers of any other book, to be understood by their readers, they should be regarded as designing to use the common arbitrary instrument of language in the same manner, under the same rules and conditions, as other writers ; — in other words, that their forms of speech are to be understood and explained, just as if they had been used in respect to any other subject, regard only being had in this, as it would be in other cases, to peculiarities of style arising from any causes peculiar to the case in hand.

A new era in the science and art of interpretation was introduced by the more celebrated John Solomon Semler of Halle, whose work in German, entitled "Preparation for Theological Exposition," was published about the same time with that of Ernesti, and was followed, through a series of years, by others in the same department. The labors of

Semler were particularly directed to the investigation of the history of the sacred books, and of that collateral knowledge which would more fully disclose their intended sense, by throwing light on the occasions and circumstances of their composition, the contemporaneous events, opinions, and customs, to which their writers would be likely to allude ; all that knowledge, in short, which helps to put the expositor of a later day in the position of a contemporary reader. He also pushed his inquiries far into the history of opinions of Jewish and Pagan origin, with the view of showing how they had affected the opinions of the church, and what was the actual source of doctrines, which had acquired currency among Christians, while they were incapable of being defended by a just exposition of their sacred books.

There is no occasion for us to pursue further the history of the scientific treatment of the principles of Biblical interpretation by the German writers. What has been brought to your notice is sufficient for our present purpose. It is obvious that the wide range of investigation proposed to the Biblical interpreter in the system of Semler,— while its results, in the proper hands, would richly contribute to what every Christian must strongly desire, a fuller and clearer illustration and comprehension of the sacred records, — would, on the other hand, be likely to lead to, and aid, very indefinite and inexact methods of reasoning concerning their sense. In fact, the *higher criticism*, as it is called, having the

advantage of a certain air of insinuation, as well as offering an attractive promise to an ambitious ingenuity, has been of late years an instrument largely used in the service of unbelief; a fact, however, which has no right to occasion any sort of apprehension, as there is no one of its methods, that have been successively resorted to for this purpose, which as yet has been employed with any permanent success, and they are unavoidably so limited in number that they must soon be exhausted. I shall conclude this Lecture with a short account of the last novelty of this kind, that has obtained much notoriety; the work entitled the "Life of Jesus," by Dr. David Frederick Strauss, first published at Tubingen in the year 1835; a book which has gone through at least three editions, and created a vast sensation in its native country, though one of its German critics says of it, that, "had it been published in England, it would have been forgotten in a couple of months."

His philosophical opinions are nowhere announced by Strauss in his work; but he is understood to be a Pantheist of the school of Hegel, and the tone of thought which pervades it confirms that idea. This would of course determine him in disbelief of Christianity; and to the *higher criticism*, so called, he has had recourse for the means of attack. "The evangelical history is a succession of instructive fables." This is the doctrine of Strauss, and his method of establishing it is by a minute exhibition of all the critical objections that can be raised

against the New Testament history. He had some acquaintance with the writings of the English infidels of the last century, as appears by his rapid review of them ; \* and he has largely repeated observations which they had made on supposed incredibilities and discrepancies in the Gospel histories. Particularly, his extensive discussion of the miraculous narratives is but a repetition and expansion of that by Woolston of the same subject.

What was new in his plan consists in this ; that, whereas others had used the argument to the end of establishing a general charge against the credit of the evangelical narratives, the object of Strauss was more specific. It was, to prove that the whole history of our Lord, as related in the Gospels, is *mythic* ; that is, that it is a kind of imaginative amplification of certain vague and slender traditions, the source of which it is now difficult to trace. These *myths* are partly historical, and partly philosophical, formed with the design of developing an ideal character of Jesus, and of harmonizing that character with the Jewish notions of the Messiah. To use the language of his French editor (for the two thick volumes have been translated into French), “According to him, Jesus, having excited in his life, and left behind at his death, a belief in his being the Messiah, and the type of a Messiah already existing in the sacred books and traditions of the Jewish people, there was formed, among the first Christians, a history of the life of Jesus, in which

\* *Leben Jesu*, § 5 (B. I. s. 15 et seq.)

particulars of his doctrine and fate were combined with that type, and which was handed down with successive modifications till the time when it was definitively fixed in the Canonical Gospels.”\*

The proper way of maintaining that ground would obviously have been, to begin with the attempt, so repeatedly made, and as often proving unsuccessful, to unsettle by historical investigation the proof of the authenticity and integrity of the four Gospels. I will not say, that, till this was done, nothing could be done; for I freely allow it to be possible that the contents of a book should be such,—in other words, the internal evidence against it so strong,—as to overbalance very weighty external proof of its authenticity. But,—unless the adverse argument from internal evidence alone could be made out with a force, which a judicious adversary would hardly pretend that it could, in the present case,—the course to be expected and required of him certainly would be, to show some weakness in the favorable external evidence. Indeed, in any event, this might be expected of him, inasmuch as proofs from different sources, bearing upon a given truth, are apt, when fully scrutinized, to be found in agreement; and their apparent contradiction, whatever be the apparent strength of either, is something to create distrust in the conclusion to which it invites.

But this attempt, so important in its bearing upon

\* *Vie de Jésus*, p. ii.

the main question, Strauss can scarcely be said to have made. His whole discussion of it occupies only ten or twelve pages of a work spread over more than fifteen hundred.\* It consists, in part, of an argument to prove, that nothing concerning the authorship of the Gospels can be safely inferred from the fact of their bearing at present the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John,—as if any friend would be disposed to put the question upon that ground;—nor does it furnish any thing which I conceive the most partial reader would incline to regard as a contribution to the earlier attempts at invalidating the ample testimony in behalf of the authenticity of those books. The author appears to be hastening towards that part of his work, for which he had more taste, and had made better preparation; and indeed, so imperfectly settled were his own opinions on this fundamental point, that, in the preface to his third edition, he says that, with the aid of certain writings of two of his countrymen, whom he names, he had renewed his examination of the fourth Gospel, that of John, and that this new survey had staggered him as to the force of the doubts which he had entertained respecting the authenticity of that Gospel. “It is not,” he says, “that I am satisfied that the fourth Gospel is authentic, but I am no longer satisfied that it is not so.”†

\* *Leben Jesu*, § 13, (Dritte Auflage, Tübingen, 1838, B. I. s. 75, et seq.)

† Ibid. s. v.

Connected with these hints respecting the origin of the Gospels, is another argument in the same section of the work under our notice. "The Christian . . . . . believer knows but one thing. It is, that whatever is told him by the received sacred books, took place literally as described . . . . If his horizon is sufficiently extended for him to look at his own religion by the side of others, and compare it with them, his judgment takes this form; 'What the Pagans relate of their gods, the Mohammedans of their prophet, is false; on the contrary, what Scripture relates of God, of Christ, and other divine persons is true.' . . . . But such an assumption is but the fruit of the individual's restraint within the bounds of the belief in which he has been reared, of his incapacity to pronounce any thing more discriminating concerning them than an affirmation of the one, and a negation of the other; — a prejudice this, which is without any scientific value, and which is dissipated by the slightest extension of historical view. Let us but place ourselves in another religious communion. The faithful Mussulman thinks he can find no truth but in his Koran, and sees nothing but fables in the greater part of the Bible. The Jew recognises no divine authority except in the Scriptures of the Old Testament; he rejects it altogether in the New. It was so too with believers in the ancient Pagan schemes. Who then is right? All, alike? That cannot be; for they deny each other's claims. Who then? Every one says that the truth is his.

Their pretensions are all equally good. Who then shall decide?"\* In short, because opposite pretensions are set up, and because the false (as they must perforce do, in order to obtain credit) mimic the true, therefore no one of them can possibly deserve any reliance; a principle of judgment, certainly, which he who should apply it to the common concerns of life, would, to say the least, get little credit for his wisdom. My hearers perceive that this is the same argument, which attracted our notice as presented at large by Hume, Gibbon, and Volney; an argument, to which, having nothing to add to what was then remarked upon it, I have now no occasion to return.

Proceeding to the body of his work, this critic, in three books, relating respectively to the Birth and Childhood, the Public Life, and the Death and Resurrection of Jesus, examines and dissects, in minute parcels, the history of which the Gospels are composed, in a diligent, learned, and ingenious endeavour to show, concerning the several portions of the narrative, that they are singly inconsistent in their parts, and otherwise incredible; that they are inconsistent with one another; and, finally, what their real probable origin was, in doctrines or narratives of the Old Testament, or in other sources.

The last of these three points is of the nature of illustration rather than argument. The argument

\* *Leben Jesu*, § 13. (B. I. s. 72.)

rests altogether in the other two, which have been already treated at some length, in connexion with the objections of Hume and of Paine. As to the incredibility of single statements on account of their own nature, the writer assumes that their being miraculous, if true, is enough to fix on them the character of incredibility;\* an assumption of the utmost consequence, but which he produces no reasoning to sustain (carrying it with him rather as a deduction from his pantheistic metaphysics), and which has already been brought to view, at least as often as any other topic, in the course of this discussion, with the purpose of showing it to be utterly hostile to the first principles of Natural Religion.

When the incredibility of single statements is argued from the alleged inconsistency of one with another, when compared together each as a whole, or from that of different parts of the same statements respectively, the argument is the same with that attempted by some of the ancient opponents, as Celsus and Porphyry, and by several of the moderns, particularly Voltaire and Paine, though, no doubt, exhibited by the present writer with much greater fulness and elaboration. In remarking on the objections of this sort by Paine, I brought some of them particularly to view. While the work of Strauss contains a much larger collection, it appears to me that Paine had, with a true judgment, selected the most plausible; so that, if he had no suc-

\* *Leben Jesu*, § 14 (B. I. s. 103.)

cess, it seems not hazardous to conclude that there is none to be reaped in that field. After the specimens given in treating of Paine's work, my audience will scarcely desire that I should pursue the minute criticism, by which alone, from their nature, such objections can be exposed ; nor could all those of Strauss, far fetched as are many of his materials, be surveyed with just comment except in a work as large as his own.

These two points, of the authorship of the Gospel narratives, and the credibility of their contents, are clearly the material ones. The other, respecting those sources in the minds of their writers, to which, supposing them to be without foundation in fact, they are to be referred, opens a sphere for illustration, but scarcely for argument. It is not capable of contributing any thing, — at all events, any thing but what is quite vague and unsubstantial, — to sustain the argument on the other two ; nor, till the infidel side of the other two, one or both, is proved, is any place opened for the investigations to which the third would lead. It may be remarked, however, in a word, that, among a great variety of singularly fanciful hypotheses concerning the elements of this or that narrative, which the evangelists have recorded in the plainest simplicity of truth, the Christian expositor will sometimes find the suggestion of coincidences between the New Testament and the Old, which have appeared to his own mind under very different aspects. For instance ; years before I had any acquaintance with

the work of Strauss, I was in the habit of pointing out, to those whose studies in the New Testament I was assisting, the resemblance between the miraculous feeding of the thousands by Jesus, and the supplies of food to the Israelites when under the conduct of Moses in the wilderness, as being designed by Jesus to intimate his claim to the character of that “prophet like unto Moses,” who, Moses had predicted, should in due time appear. The use which the German critic makes of the resemblance is, to suggest that the record in the Old Testament gave the hint of a fiction for the New.

There is perhaps nothing in this extraordinary book suited to occasion more surprise than the view which its author professes to have taken of it. “The author is satisfied,” says he, in the Preface to his first edition,\* “that the internal essence of the Christian faith stands completely independent of his critical researches. The supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension to heaven, remain eternal truths, notwithstanding the doubts expressed concerning the reality of those events as historical facts. This certainty alone can give to our criticism repose and dignity, distinguishing it from the literal interpretations of earlier times,—interpretations which, aiming to overthrow religious truth along with historical facts, were necessarily tainted with a character of frivolity. I shall show that the dogmatic sense of the life of Jesus has suffered no injury under my hand.

\* B. I. s. ix.

Meanwhile let the reader consent to regard the coolness and tranquillity, with which my criticism, in the progress of the work, undertakes methods apparently full of danger, as indicating my firm conviction that I am offering no injury to the Christian faith." I know no reason authorizing us to say that he used this language in irony. If he did, it will cease to have the extraordinary peculiarity, which, seriously understood, it possesses. If not, it will help to solve the problem of the book. It will serve to read its own riddle. The mind, which understands itself to be offering no injury whatever to Christianity, when it labors to show the history of its founder and its foundation to be all a fable, subdues the surprise we are tempted to feel when we find it employing its powers against the record of that religion, in the use of such arguments as are many that here are urged.

My next and concluding lecture will pursue the subject of recent infidelity in Germany and elsewhere.

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## LECTURE XXIV.

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### RECENT STATE OF OPINION IN GERMANY AND FRANCE.

IN giving an account, in the latter part of my last Lecture, of that elaborate *extravaganza* of German infidelity embodied in Dr. Strauss's work called the “Life of Jesus,” I somewhat anticipated the succession of events in order to arrive at that latest famous form of assault upon Christianity, which has grown out of an atheistic philosophy, combined with a criticism, of great pretensions, but doing its unhappy office with a total disregard of all sound principles of the art of interpretation of language. If the testimony of either friends or foes is to be trusted respecting the condition of opinion in that country, the German mind at the present day is as much incapacitated for any just consideration of Christianity, by a revival of the old pantheism of the mystical East, as was the French mind in the latter half of the last century, by the grosser and more plain-spoken atheism of

Diderot, Von Holbach, and their associates. Strauss himself, in a recent composition, entitled "The Transient and the Permanent in Christianity," says, "From an impulse, which, as a miasma, has spread, especially over all Germany, monuments to great men and lofty spirits arise on every side. This disposition is not a secret of the philosophers only; as an obscure instinct, it has become the universal spirit of the age. . . . A new Paganism, or, it may be, a new Catholicism, has come over Protestant Germany. Men are no longer satisfied with one incarnation of God. They desire, after the manner of the Indians, a series of repeated *avatars*. . . . The tendency of the age is to honor the revelation of God in all the spirits which have wrought, with life and creative power, on mankind. The only worship,—we may deplore it, or we may praise it, deny it we cannot,—the only worship which remains for the cultivated classes of this age, from the religious decline of the last, is the worship of genius."\* Henry Heine, the highest perhaps, on the whole, of all names in the estimation of what is called *Young Germany*, says in his "Allemagne," "The national faith of Europe, but more at the North than the South, was pantheistic." "Man abandons not willingly what has been dear to his fathers." "Germany is at present the fertile soil of Pantheism. That is the religion of our

\* I take this quotation from the Boston reprint (pp. 90, 91,) of an article on "The School of Hegel" in the "Princeton Review" for January 1840.

greatest thinkers, of our best artists, and Deism is destroyed there in theory. You do not hear it spoken of, but every one knows it. Pantheism is the public secret of Germany. We have, in fact, outgrown Deism. . . . . We are of age, and need no fatherly care. We are not the handy-work of any great mechanic. Deism is a good religion for slaves, for children, for Genevese, for watch-makers.” \*

But to go back a little way, to a time when the influence of a thoroughly vicious philosophy upon Christian faith was less developed and less controlling. In the rapid revolutions of sentiment in Germany, the *Rationalist* party (so called), which, twenty-five years ago, when many of us were coming on the stage, was so considerable, is said to be now nearly extinct. With minor diversities of opinion among themselves, the Rationalists,—or *Naturalists*, as they were otherwise named, in distinction from Supernaturalists,—occupied the same ground in relation to Christianity as that class of English Deists, which is represented by Morgan; nor do their main views respecting our religion call for any remark additional to what were formerly made in treating the works of that writer. They esteemed Christianity as, on the whole, a pure system of doctrine, and a right and profitable directory of conduct; but they denied its miraculous origin and supernatural authority.

\* Tome I. pp. 19, 32, 104, 105. (Edit. Paris, 1835.)

Professing to respect the religion while they ascribed to it only a human origin, its apparent claim to supernatural authority was, of course, if they would see the question to the bottom, a point to be somehow disposed of by them. The attempt to dispose of it was made in different ways.

The method of Kant was one, exhibited in a work, in which he proposed what he called a "Moral Exposition of the Holy Scriptures." It was mentioned in my last lecture that Kant professed a belief in God, and when his great work, the "Critique of Pure Reason," was appealed to as sustaining the opposite opinion, produced another, entitled the "Critique of Practical Reason," in which he inserted an argument for Theism, generally regarded, by all parties, as an incongruity in the scheme. As to the point now before us, Kant's doctrine was, that the New Testament records were not to be interpreted as history, but were to be regarded as having an allegorical meaning, as far as they had any. His view accorded, as to its main principle of interpretation, with that proposed by Woolston, of which I formerly treated, but differed from it in this particular, that Kant represented the alleged allegories as containing not at all a speculative, but only a moral, practical sense. In terms, of which I endeavour strictly to retain the sense, and at the same time to express it in language simple and intelligible, he maintained that the Christian records are to be made useful by the application which the inter-

preter himself makes of them, and that thus in judicious hands they may be made a fund of moral instruction.

"From all religions, ancient and modern, deposited in sacred books, have flowed," he says, "the same results; that is, considerate and well-intentioned teachers of the people have made such accommodations of them as to bring them into harmony with the prevailing principles of moral belief. Thus the moralists of Greece and Rome treated their fabulous theology, and finally learned how to expound the grossest polytheism as a symbolical representation of the qualities of one sole Deity, and to develope a mystical sense in the deeds of their divinities,—vicious as they often were,—and in the most extravagant reveries of their poets; to the end that the popular belief, which it would not have been prudent to destroy, might be brought to some approximation to a just rule of duty. The custom of such interpretation is universal. The Mohammedans labor to fix a mystical sense upon the voluptuous descriptions of their paradise, and the Hindoos, at least the more enlightened of them, do the like with their Vedas. And in the same way should the documents of the Christian religion, the books of the Old and New Testament, receive, by a free interpretation, a sense such as accords with the universal and practical laws of a pure and rational religion; and such an interpretation, even though it should do apparent violence, or *even real violence*, to the text, deserves to be preferred to a

close interpretation, such as has been often employed. Thus the fierce denunciations of enemies, in several Psalms, may be applied to the appetites and passions which we ought always to endeavour to tread under our feet; and thus [an illustration this, whieh removes all obscurity from his meaning] the wonders related in the New Testament, of the heavenly origin of Jesus, and his peculiar relation to God, are figurative representations of the ideal of a humanity to which the Deity is reconciled.”\*

“Kant,” says Strauss, who criticizes him, “thinks that he vindicates this method of interpretation from the reproach of disingenuousness, when he says, that it does not maintain that the sense fixed by it upon the sacred books was actually in the minds of their writers. This is an inquiry which it does not care to institute; it only claims a right to put upon those books such a sense as it finds suitable to give.”† In short, the theory is this; The sacred books are to be made useful by a judicious interpretation; and that interpretation, so to call it, consists not in examining the books in order to ascertain and then receive the sense of their writers, but in connecting with them, by force of imagination, some foreign sense, which their contents in a figurative application may serve to illustrate to the reader’s mind. Their writers are not to be regarded as speaking with authority, nor even are the books to be consulted as containing a wholly or partially true record.

\* Strauss, *Leben Jesu*, § 7 (B. I. ss. 29, 30.)

† Ibid. (s. 31.)

Of the Rationalist school of interpreters, no name perhaps had for a time a greater celebrity than that of Paulus, professor of the Oriental Languages in the University of Jena, where he published, in 1800, his "Commentary on the New Testament" in four volumes. His method of disposing of the miraculous relations in the New Testament was altogether different from that of Kant. "The first duty," says Paulus, "of one who would thoroughly master the New Testament history is, to distinguish in it between what is fact, and what is only the writer's judgment upon fact. A fact is that which has been experienced or perceived by some one standing in relations to it; a judgment is the construction which that person or others have put upon the fact in referring it to a supposed cause. These two constituent parts are so easily blended and confounded in the apprehensions, both of the witnesses of a fact and of subsequent narrators, that often the judgment and the fact can no longer be severed, and both go down to posterity as one, on the same authority. This confusion is particularly apparent in the historical books of the New Testament; for in the time of Jesus there was a controlling propensity to refer every striking incident to an invisible and superhuman cause. The principal care, then, of him who would ascertain the veritable facts preserved in the New Testament, should be, to separate the two elements, so closely conjoined, and yet so different in nature and import, and to disengage the naked fact from the

opinions of individuals and of the time, which enclose it as the shell does a nut. And this must be done by carrying one's self back, in imagination, as completely as possible, to the theatre of the events and the point of view which the time affords, and in that position endeavouring to fill out the primitive outline, by the supposition of accessory circumstances, which the narrator himself, occupied by his bias toward the supernatural, has often neglected to indicate.”\*

In conformity with these principles, Paulus proceeds to dissect the Gospel history in his “Commentary,” and in his more recent work entitled the “Life of Jesus.” He admits an historical basis for the facts ; but resolves every thing supernatural in the accounts, as we have them, into false perceptions or opinions of the narrators. Jesus walking on the water of the lake of Gennesareth, for instance, is to be understood as having waded in it, or walked along its beach ; and the narrative of his Transfiguration is the result of the excited imagination of his disciples, who saw him conversing with two strangers on a mountain, while his person was illumined by the first beams of the dawn. Paulus was not alone in this hopeless scheme of misinterpretation. Bahrdt had preceded him in an outline of the plan, and Venturini followed with a set of conjectures, of the same character as to their bearing on the main question, though considerably

\* Strauss, *Leben Jesu*, § 6, (B. I. ss. 24, 25.)

different in detail. But the plan of reducing the Gospel history to a succession of narratives by men honest in their representations, but mistaken as to what they represented,—a plan seductive in its first idea,—proved in its application altogether too unmanageable. The fantastic suppositions to which it had to resort, imposed a much harder task upon a reasonable faith, than the miracles which they proposed to supersede; and it has not, as far as I know, a living defender of any considerable name.

Schleiermacher, the late celebrated Professor at Berlin, was the head of a school which appears to have died, as it began, with him; as I find it stated in a recent letter of De Wette,—his admirer, though but partially his disciple,—that only one of his scholars, in a Swiss city, now represents him in the high places of instruction.\* Schleiermacher was deep in the pantheistic metaphysics; and they settled the character of his theology. "Religion," according to him, "is the sense of the union of the individual with the universe, with Nature, with the One and All. Its sphere is sentiment, feeling. It has nothing to do with belief, action, or morality. It is independent of the idea of a personal God. The idea of a personal God is mere mythology. Faith in and desire for personal immortality are wholly irreligious. The aim of religion is the annihilation of one's own personality, a living in the One and All, a becoming, as far as possible, one with

\* De Wette's *Theodore*, Boston Translation, p. xxxvii.

the universe."\* As to Christianity, this writer, like the others who have been mentioned, disregards the historical proof of it as a direct miraculous revelation; but, as far as he proposes to recognise and use it, he *legitimizes* it, — to employ a phrase of the new philosophy, — by a reverse process of his own, starting from the point of personal consciousness. "As a member of the Christian community," says he, "I am conscious to myself of the annihilation of my proneness to sin, and of my share in absolute perfection; — that is to say, belonging to the Christian association, I am sensible to the influences exerted over me by a principle sinless and perfect. These influences cannot proceed from the Christian community itself, in the sense of being a result of the mutual action of its members on each other; for sin and imperfection reside in every one of them, and a congregation of impure beings never gave birth to any thing pure. It is necessary then to ascribe this to the influence of a person, who, on the one hand, was himself sinless and perfect, and who, on the other, sustained a relation to the Christian community, by force of which those qualities might be communicated to it from his person; and, since the community could not have existed as such previously to this communication, it follows that he must

\* *Ueber der Religion*, ss. 48 et seq. 53, 54, 21, et seq. 110 et seq. 59, 118 et seq. (Edit. 4. Berlin, 1831.) I was directed to these passages by the references in the *Discourse on the Latest Form of Infidelity*, by Mr. Norton, whose words (p. 44.) are used in the above abstract.

have been its founder.”\* As Christians, we are sensible, in short, that something has operated upon us ; and, reasoning from effect to cause, we pass from this operation to an influence of Christ, and from that influence to himself, who possessed the power of producing on us the effect in question.

This reasoning backwards from an observed state of a Christian mind to an influence of Christ, and from his influence to his existence, is certainly an extraordinary method of proving his existence ; extraordinary on account of the possible analysis which it supposes of the nature of the sentiment experienced, making it capable of being the basis of such a conclusion in respect to a remote matter of fact, as well as for other reasons not less obvious. Still, as far as we have yet gone, the conclusion seems to be, that there was in fact such a person as the reputed founder of Christianity, and that his life and fate were such as the Gospels record. But Schleiermacher, whose name, meaning *veil-maker*, has been remarked upon as not inapplicable to his habit of using language, does not appear elsewhere to have satisfied himself of that truth. He cannot blind himself to the fact, that his method of proof falls very far short of evincing that Christ was and did all that the Christian scriptures attribute to him. And, to be consistent with his scheme, he maintains, that neither the miracles of Jesus, nor the facts of his resurrection and

\* Strauss, *Leben Jesu*, § 146, (B. II. s. 743.)

ascension, are any essential part of the Christian faith. It is with manifest correctness, at all events, that Strauss remarks, at the close of a criticism upon his scheme, that it was justly “ charged with sustaining the inference of no more than an ideal, that is, a fabulous, Christ; . . . . for, in order to produce the effects which Schleiermacher ascribes to Christ, no more than a mental conception of him was necessary, and indeed no other was possible, agreeably to the principles of this theologian respecting the relation between God [that is, what he called God,] and the world,— between the natural and the supernatural.\*”

In such a survey as this, brief as it is, it would be impossible to pass over the name of De Wette, a name perhaps more extensively known in this country than that of any other living German theologian. In a Preface to a recent translation of one of his smaller works, he is said to “ represent better than any other author with whom we are acquainted, not the present tendencies of German theology, but its present average condition ; and, standing very near the centre of speculation, to be an author well adapted to convey to American readers a general idea of the state of German opinions.”† But it seems to me that this medium position is only attained by mutual contradictions in different parts of his writings, which represent him as at one time favoring opinions and modes

\* Strauss, *Leben Jesu* § 146. (B. II. s. 752.) † *Theodore*, Vol. I. p. xix.

of speculation, which at another time he appears to condemn. In another notice, by an American admirer, I am equally surprised to find it said, that "his charm lies in his genial, flowing style, and his strong common sense, joined with great poetic sensibility, and giving clearness and beauty to the most perplexing topics." \* On the contrary, it appears to me, that what the reader particularly and perpetually misses in his works, is not only the strong common sense which leads to correct opinions, but the clearness which may characterize a statement and defence of erroneous ones. Indeed, so difficult have I found it to make out, within tolerable limits, any description of his heterogeneous views, which should not be liable to some exception drawn from some insulated passage of his works, that I prefer to avoid, as far as may be, the hazard of doing him injustice, by giving a few periods, in which, with perhaps as much precision as anywhere else, he presents his idea of the authority of Christianity, and then availing myself of representations which show how it has been understood by others.

"The new rational theology," says De Wette himself, "must accomplish the solution of the problem of producing a living recognition of faith in its independence of metaphysical and historical knowledge; so that, finally, without resolving the events in the history of Jesus into what is merely ideal, it may cause them to be received in their ideal significance as conveying ideas of faith, not

\* *Christian Examiner*, Vol. XXIV. p. 138.

resting the truth of Christian faith upon common, naked, historical truth, but confining the historical proof to the few essential events, and leaving the rest open to free inquiry. Especially let it renounce that poor and unscientific appeal to miraculous evidence, which has hitherto been customary.”\* Again he says, “The original, innocent belief in miracles, was nothing but a branch of the moral faith, that a man with purer, diviner power of spirit and life, the pure, ideal man, had appeared; a faith that needed not for its assurance any speculative, historical proof, but simply the practical proof from the excitement and direction of life received from him.”†

“The system of De Wette,” says Mr. Norton, “I conceive to be this; The truths of religion are immediately perceived, or, as he expresses it, felt by the mind. They need, or rather admit of, no other evidence than this intuitive perception. This alone affords that certainty which is necessary to faith. Faith cannot rest on reasoning, or external testimony, or historical knowledge . . . . The history of Christ is properly no object of religious faith. No new warranty of the truths of religion is given by their having been taught by him. . . . . The outline of his history is true, but, as regards the accounts in the Gospels, there is much that is questionable. . . . . These accounts are to be regarded rather morally and spiritually, than in their

\* In an article on a work of Olshausen in the *Theologische Studien und Kritiken*, von Ulmann und Umbreit, 1834. ss. 151, 152.

† Ibid. p. 145.

literal meaning. They are to be viewed as symbolical of the *ideal* in religion. . . . . They may have abstract truth without historical reality, and, apart from all inquiry into their authenticity, may serve for spiritual edification.” \*

It will be observed that this system, in some of the particulars described, accords precisely with the plain English Deism of Morgan, while in others it runs into the mystical rhetoric of Schleiermacher. I add only the account of Strauss, who speaks of De Wette throughout in a friendly and respectful manner, and who, from his own practical acquaintance with the extraordinary phraseology of his countrymen on such subjects, must be esteemed a competent interpreter. “ De Wette,” says he, “ has attributed to the evangelical history a symbolic, ideal character, in virtue of which it is the expression and image of the human mind and its aptitudes. The history of the miraculous conception of Jesus, according to him, represents the divine origin of religion; the recitals of his miracles typify the independent force of the human soul, and the sublime doctrine of the spiritual confidence which man reposes in himself; his resurrection is the type of the victory of truth, the heralding sign of the triumph, one day to be accomplished, of good over evil ; his ascension is a symbol of the everlasting glory of religion. The fundamental religious ideas which Jesus announced in his doctrine, are expressed with equal clearness. His history is an expression of enthusiasm, in his

\* Norton’s *Remarks on a Late Pamphlet*, pp. 62, 63.

courageous ministry, and in the conquering power of his coming ; an expression of resignation, in his conflict with the wickedness of men, in the mournful tone of his prophecies, and, above all, in his death. Christ on the cross is, in his view, the image of humanity purified by sacrifice. . . . . Finally, the idea of devotion is the key-note of the history of Jesus.”\* Strauss well concludes his sketch of the scheme of De Wette, and of another less noted theologian, Horst (who carried it out still further), by remarking, “ It is not faith only, it is science also, which is dissatisfied with such a point of view. Science perceives that to refer ideas to a simple possibility, to which no actual verity corresponds, is to suppress and destroy them altogether ; ”† which appears to be but a German way of saying, that, in the view of science, to deny that a thing related ever actually took place, is as much as to contradict the truth of the relation.

When from Germany we turn to France, our attention is not attracted to any considerable recent work expressly directed against the authority of our religion. But the prevailing tone of its literature presents only too decisive indications, that the influence of the infidel works of the last age, particularly of the popular writings of Voltaire, has not passed away from the mind of that great people. Meanwhile its philosophy, in the rise of what calls itself, with no evident propriety, the *Eclectic School*, has, in the adoption of most of its elements from

\* *Leben Jesu* § 147. (B. II. ss. 757, 758.)

† *Ibid.* (s. 760.)

German speculation, manifested more clearly an anti-Christian tendency, the more it has been developed. Until within thirty years, the philosophy of Condillac, who, professing to tread in the footsteps of Locke, proceeded to conclusions which that great philosopher never would have owned as flowing from, or in any way consistent with, his own principles, made the approved metaphysics of France. The progress of the re-action from that system,—called, by those who have revolted from it, the system of the *sensuous* or *sensual* school (a name explained by them as descriptive of the fact of its referring all knowledge ultimately to sensation), —may be traced, by whoever is disposed to such inquiries, in the compendious Essay, by Damiron, “On the History of Philosophy in France in the Nineteenth Century;” a work however which requires to be read with the most ample allowance for the partiality of its author to the new philosophy.

The first remarkable appearance of dissent from the doctrines of Condillac was exhibited in 1811 and the two following years, in a series of Lectures, delivered in Paris by Laromiguière, in which was maintained the theory that the mental faculties, both of understanding and of volition, have a different principle from sensation, and are to be referred to attention as their ultimate basis. Maine de Biran followed with another blow at the received hypothesis, in bringing into prominent view the principle of the original activity of the human mind, and working up that element into the doctrine that will, cause,

and personality are identical, which has been called “a re-instating of spiritualism in philosophy on the basis of experience.” The new views acquired still more completeness and consideration in the hands of Royer-Collard, who kept no longer any terms with the system of Condillac; and of Royer-Collard, Victor Cousin was the favorite pupil and friend.

In 1817 and 1818, having succeeded his master two or three years before as Professor of Philosophy in the Normal School at Paris, Cousin passed several months in Germany, for the purpose of acquainting himself with the speculations then in credit in that country; and, without adopting as a whole any system which he found there, his views then took decidedly, as they had probably before partially taken, a congenial direction, which has caused him since to be regarded as the most intelligible expositor of German metaphysics to the Western nations. Though a voluminous writer, he has as yet embodied his views in no set treatise, his work entitled by the American translator “Elements of Psychology” consisting only of a portion of the author’s series of lectures “On the History of Philosophy in the Eighteenth Century”; but the outlines of his system may perhaps be as well understood from his disconnected treatises, as the nature of the system admits. We are no further concerned with it than as to what respects its relations to theology.

Cousin identifies the Godhead with an abstract idea. A personal, individual Deity finds no place in his system. The finite, the infinite, and the re-

lation of the finite to the infinite,—“These ideas,” says he, in so many words, “are God himself.”\* These three elements, “a triplicity, which resolves itself into unity, and a unity which develops itself into triplicity,” “forms the foundation of Eternal Reason.” “Here is that thrice holy God, whom the family of man recognises and adores. . . . But we are now above the world, above humanity, above human reason. We are no longer in nature and humanity, we are only in the world of ideas.”† I can imagine no way of reconciling such language with the belief of a God in any proper sense of that word, as an intelligent agent in his universe, and the living object of an intelligent regard. A general idea is nothing. It is a creation of man’s intelligence. A God is the being who made us, not the thing which we make. If there is meaning in language, to own no other deity than this, is to be “without God in the world.”

While what I can regard in no other light, than as a denial of a God by this writer, removes the necessary basis on which Christianity, to be sustained at all, must stand, I find nothing in his works which affords us opportunity to combat an argument against the divine origin of that religion. So far as his philosophy should obtain prevalence, an assault of that nature would become superfluous. The foundation sinking, the edifice would fall. The position, which Cousin has chosen publicly to occupy in relation to it, may be judged from the

\* *Introduction, &c.* p. 158.

† *Ibid.* pp. 131, 132.

few following sentences. “Christianity,” he says, “is the philosophy of the people. He who now addresses you sprang from the people, and from Christianity, and I trust you will always recognise this in my *profound and tender respect for all that is of the people and of Christianity*. Philosophy is patient. She knows what was the course of events in former generations, and she is full of confidence in the future. Happy in seeing the great bulk of mankind in the arms of Christianity, she offers, with modest kindness, to assist her in ascending to a yet loftier elevation.”\* Again, he calls it “the best of all religions, and the most accomplished of all,” and notes, that “the Christian religion is that which of all other religions came last,” and that “it is unreasonable to suppose that the religion which came last should not be better than all others, should not embrace and recapitulate them all.”†

A translation of miscellaneous papers of his, published four years ago in this city, contains a short extract from a “Report on the State of Public Instruction in Prussia,” in which he recommends the teaching of Christianity in the schools of France; but it is not on grounds which imply any conviction of its authoritative character, where, had such a conviction been entertained, the occasion could not well have failed to lead to its expression. “We must teach our children,” he says, “that religion which civilized our fathers, that religion whose liberal spirit prepared, and can alone sustain, all the

\* *Introduction, &c.*, p. 57.

† *Ibid.* pp. 338, 339.

great institutions of modern times. . . . The man who holds this language to you is a philosopher, formerly disliked, and even persecuted, by the priesthood; but this philosopher has a mind too little affected by the recollection of his own insults, not to regard religion as an indestructible power, genuine Christianity as a means of civilization for the people, and a necessary support for those on whom society imposes irksome and humble duties, without the slightest prospect of fortune, without the least gratification of self-love.\*” This is language very suitable to its purpose; but it is the language of a politician, and not in the slightest degree inconsistent with utter infidelity on the part of him who uses it.

The truly French mind of Benjamin Constant had not gone through the same training in German dialectics; and his work, published ten or fifteen years ago, entitled “On Religion, considered in its Source, its Forms, and its Developements,” affords us so far a better indication of the state of feeling and opinion, in the highest speculative quarters in France, in respect to Christianity regarded in its proper character of an authoritative revelation. With him the germ of religion, the sentiment, is implanted by nature in the human soul. The rest is discovery; the improved knowledge of its truths keeping pace with the progress of intelligence, and the great doctrines obtaining access at the great

eras of the advancement of humanity. In his philosophy, what distinguishes man from other creatures is his capacity or propensity for religion. He labors the argument, with great variety of illustration from history and books of travels, that this capacity or propensity is universal ; and in his view it assumes the place of a substantial proof of the existence of some higher power.

The religious sentiment tends to clothe itself in some form, to embody and establish itself in some institutions, because it seeks companionship and sympathy, and desires to be assured of its perpetuity in the world. But these forms and institutions, being something unchangeable and stable, while religious sentiment tends to constant advancement, come at length to obstruct the growth of those ideas and feelings which once they fitly represented. For a time there will be an effort so to interpret the external form, as to correspond to the improved intellectual conception. But that endeavour, in the continually advancing change of the conception, will at length become too unsatisfactory, and will be abandoned. In short, there will be a religious revolution, introducing a new set of symbols and institutions befitting the new position which the mind has reached.

The succession of instituted religions, of forms of faith and worship, corresponds to the great periods in the civilization of man ; for the object of his worship is always the highest excellence which he has attained the capacity of conceiving. He

embodies in his religion his best ideas of truth, beauty, and goodness. The grossest form is that of fetichism, the worship of a visible, inanimate object. But, where it prevails, it represents the highest idea which the savages that practise it are capable of grasping. At length, however, the progress of the mind dissolves this connexion. Fetichism and a degree of civilization cannot co-exist. The latter is tenacious ; the former is thrown off ; and polytheism takes its place. The temples, altars, and statues of many gods are set up.

The natural religious sentiment expands itself in this form. Its period of novelty is a period of enthusiasm. Then comes a time of reflection and method, and the worship and faith take a definite, and, as a definite, so too a permanent shape, which tallies with the habits of thought, with the degree of mental and moral advancement, of the age when it is elaborated and matured. But polytheism is destined in its turn to be overthrown by a revolution growing out of similar causes to those which installed it in power. Civilization cannot stop at the point which it has reached, and polytheism, fastened to a spot by its formulas of faith and its public ritual, cannot keep up with its march. The distance keeps widening, till at last these two part company, and polytheism is left behind to perish, as fetichism had been before. The human mind has grown up to theism, and then, still further, from the theism of the law of Moses it has grown up to that of Christianity.

Such, in brief, is the system of Benjamin Constant. In order to attribute to it unity and completeness, it would be necessary to understand him as regarding Christianity not in the light of a supernatural communication from God to man, but as a scheme elaborated by the mind of man, and good for the uses of the period when it was devised, as fetishism first, and then polytheism, had been before it ; and that this was the view to which his own mind decidedly leaned, I conceive will be the conclusion of every reader of his work.

Yet he shrank from the assertion of that view ; and, in a couple of pages at the end of his five volumes, he is at pains to say that his system does not exclude the idea of an occasional supernatural interposition, because it is not incredible that a direct divine agency should come in aid of a tendency of the human soul, already developed, but weak and struggling with difficulties.\* It is not improbable, that as, according to a letter of his own published by Chateaubriand, he changed his mind, in the progress of his work, from disbelief to belief in a divinity, so the inquiries, through which it had conducted him, had created some distrust of the possibility of ascribing that human origin to Christianity, which is necessary in order to bring the appearance of that religion into accordance with the doctrine of the treatise, and which there can be little doubt, that, at least till a late period of his labors, he in-

\* *De la Religion, &c.* Tome V. pp. 205 — 207. (Edit. Paris, 1831.)

tended to affirm. If so, the fact affords an agreeable illustration, which one wishes had been made more distinct, of the force of truth, on the one side, and of the openness to conviction of a learned theorist's mind, on the other. He says also, in another place, of the Jewish religion, that it is impossible to refer it to an Egyptian origin, and adds, "I declare this with the stronger conviction, inasmuch as my opinion has been very slowly formed, and as it were in spite of myself. The appearance and the permanence of the Jewish theism at a time and among a people, equally incapable of conceiving the idea, and of preserving it when presented, are phenomena which cannot be explained to my mind by the common principles of reasoning. If that which I call *revelation*, divine teaching, light proceeding from the wisdom and goodness of God, be called by others an inward sentiment, the development of a germ implanted in the human soul, it is of little consequence."\*

The last clause shows in what sense,—a sense quite consistent with the denial of supernatural operation,—he was disposed to trace the Jewish religion to a revelation from God. He appears to have designed to use the word *revelation* in the same sense as that which we formerly saw to be admitted by the English Deist, Morgan,—that is, of a discovery made by some single mind in a natural use of its faculties under the influence of favor-

\* *De la Religion, &c.* Tome II. pp. 219—221.

able circumstances directed by the providence of God; a sense, in which obviously the truths revealed become a subject of faith only to the mind which has been enabled to discover them. To any other mind, they can only rest, as before, on their own intrinsic reasons, such as these may be.

The writings, to which our attention has been given this evening, demanded notice in the enumeration that has been undertaken, because of the important influence, which respectively they have exerted or are exerting; although they have not, in the same express manner as others, assailed particular points of the evidence on which a reasonable Christian finds his belief. Had they done so, they would have supplied to us, as other writings have done, a topic for some particular course of argument in refutation of their anti-Christian conclusions. What they have done is, with more or less explicitness, to assume,—to assume, not to argue,—three things; 1. That the truths, embraced in Christianity, more or fewer, were truths capable of discovery by the human mind in the natural use of its functions, or that they need no other proof than the mind's own intuitions; 2. That a miraculous, divine attestation to those truths is essentially incredible; 3. That, in point of historical truth, a reasonable man may withhold his belief from the testimony contained in the Christian records.

To each of these propositions a detailed answer was given in my first course of Lectures; and, if the view, which upon each successively was then pre-

sented, was well sustained, neither of them can bear examination.

As to the abstract credibility of miraculous interposition, it is just as undeniable as is the existence of an almighty and benevolent God, who will benefit his creatures in this way when the exigency is such as to make this way the appropriate one. As to the rightful demand of the Gospels upon a reasonable man's belief, it is just as certain as, what I endeavoured to show, that they were, without controversy, the production of the honest and competent writers whose name they bear. And, as to intuition of the truth of Christianity, independent of external evidence sustaining the divine authority of its founder,—if any man tells me that he believes the doctrine of immortality, for instance, not on the authoritative declaration of Jesus, but on the ground of its own intrinsic verisimilitude, because it seems to his mind reasonable, because it looks as if it were true, I will not say I envy him his easy faith, but sure I am, that he is the last person to tax me with credulity. I cannot be so credulous as he. I cannot accept so vast a dogma without further proof. And that proof, which my reasoning faculty in this case requires, is the word of him who called on me to believe him for his “very works' sake,”—the works which God, dwelling in him, enabled him to do. I can find no other safe foothold, and therefore would be devoutly thankful for this. With Locke, whose mind had as much within its unaided range as most men's, I do not

find that I know enough alone about God and duty, and am fain to “ thank God for the light of Revelation, which sets my poor reason at rest in many things that lay beyond the reach of its discovery.”

I have thus concluded, in a manner doubtless most unworthy of the subject, that survey of the infidel writers of ancient and modern times, begun in my course of Lectures last winter. I am not aware that any original contribution to the infidel argument has recently attracted attention in England or this country; — the “ *Diegesis* ” of Taylor, which obtained some circulation, being but a *rifacimento* of Bolingbroke, Paine, Voltaire, and especially Dupuis and Volney; and other compends of less pretensions, as far as they have come to my knowledge, being marked with a similar character. In this survey, while it would have been impossible to particularize every writer against Christianity, unless I had chosen the unprofitable task of naming each with a few passing comments, and that at the expense of wearisome repetition of the same thoughts, I have in no instance intentionally omitted to bring to view the principal representative of each separate class of objections; and it has been my honest purpose, pursued to the best of my capacity and knowledge, neither to pass over nor to misrepresent any hostile argument. I ought perhaps to add in respect to, here and there, a view of my own,—the least likely, it may be, of any which I have presented, to obtain general acceptance,

in the actual state of opinion,—that it would be erroneous for any hearer to identify them with the opinions of any denomination of Christians. Right or wrong, no such connexion in point of fact exists; and I may make this remark more specific in relation to views expressed respecting the interpretation of the Old Testament and its connexion with the New; views, which, in their main features, I do not know to have been maintained by any writer.

In relieving your patience, might I hope that, in the course of the reflections which have engaged us together, some reluctant mind has been won to the joys of faith, or some doubting spirit found repose, there is no other service which I should so rejoice to have performed. Nor, in parting from those who have honored me with their attention, can I utter any other friendly wish with so cordial an emphasis, as that they may have continually deeper and brighter convictions, from their own experience, of the worth of that glorious Gospel, which, to the intelligent believer, is “the wisdom of God and the power of God,” and the choicest of all expressions of his unutterable goodness.











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